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L. A. G. Strong	THE SHORT STORY: NOTES AT RANDOM	281
H. E. Bates	THE BATH	292
S. K. Padover	THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS	303
Rearden Conner	THE FRIENDS	308
Marian Bower	CHARLOTTE AND AN EXQUISITE	313
Boris Pilniak	THE ASSASSINATION	328
Ann Napier	EVERY WEDNESDAY	360
A. G. Morris	BOOTS IN THE STUDY	368
Eardley Beswick	A WEST COUNTRY TALE	372
Jules Romains	QUINETTE'S CRIME	388
	OUR CONTRIBUTORS	414

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L. A. G. STRONG

The Short Story: Notes at random

"It seems reasonably safe to suggest that writers of short stories in this country were more enterprising and more varied in their appeal ten or fifteen years ago than they are to-day. One can quarrel about the reasons for this state of affairs, but of the change itself there can be little question. The short story in England to-day is tending to become standardized." *Times Literary Supplement*, Jan. 11, 1934.

EVERY advance in art brings with it a certain amount of snobbery. During the last twenty years the short story has been liberated from the bonds of "plot" and "situation," and has developed along the lines of characterisation and atmosphere. In the hands of various experimenters it has sought a psychological unity and completeness, rather than a physical. It has been concerned as much with what its characters thought and felt as with what they did. The modern short story writer is content if, allowing the reader to glance at his characters as through a window, he shows them making a gesture which is typical: that is to say, a gesture which enables the reader's imagination to fill in all that is left unsaid. Instead of giving us a finished action to admire, or pricking the bubble of some problem, he may give us only the key-piece of a mosaic, around which, if

sufficiently perceptive, we can see in shadowy outline the completed pattern.

This new freedom, excellent in itself and essential to the development of the short story, has had unfortunate consequences; one of which is that certain devout critics and artists have hastily concluded that "plot" and "situation" stories are necessarily bad. The fallacy, which has its counterpart in every art and period, is natural, but may do harm. The new artist must, of course, believe in the rightness of what he is doing, but he need not therefore believe that everything else is a mistake. Still less need his disciples, who have not the excuse of a blinding creative urgency.

All the same, we must admit that the modern short story writer has some excuses for intolerance. He is extending the boundaries of his art, and so naturally reacts most strongly from the work that immediately precedes him. The plot story has had a long innings, and the popular magazines still demand it. Young writers of quality have always a low opinion of the popular taste, and thus to them the syllogism is highly tempting. "Plot" and "situation" stories, the fodder of their fathers, insisted upon still by the editors of commercial journals, are therefore bad stories. Very often they are—but not primarily because they are plot and situation stories. The bad stories are just bad examples of a class or form which, in itself, is neither good nor bad, but which, like the sonnet, epigram, or any other form, depends entirely upon whether it is well or badly handled.

This is a truism, but it is worth calling attention to because categorical statements have lately appeared in print, over names which carry weight, to the effect that plot and situation stories are, *ipso facto*, bad art; and because of the contemptuous dismissal of the work of certain highly skilled artists simply because it belongs to this class. Some of our critics forget

too much. They extol De Maupassant, whose stories are nearly all "situation." They adore Tchekov, forgetting that the author of *The Head of the Family* also wrote *Volodya*, and *The Black Monk*. They ignore the fact that Mr. Somerset Maugham is a regular contributor to the popular magazines. They ignore the fact that stories by Mr. Coppard, Mr. Hemingway, Mr. Faulkner, and other writers of the highest integrity have appeared in popular magazines both here and in America. They ignore a good deal else that it suits them to ignore: and probably it is not too much to say that, were Mr. Coppard (for instance) to become a regular instead of a spasmodic contributor to popular magazines, they would conclude that his work had degenerated and refuse to read it.

When a popular magazine buys a story from a writer, the greater part of whose work it will not take, it is not as a rule because the story is better or worse than usual, but because one of two things has happened. Either he has been interested in a theme which, in itself, is interesting to a large number of people, or he has written a plot or situation story. This he has done, not in order to please an editor, but because the subject which presented itself to him called for that sort of treatment. The "serious" writer who deliberately attempts to cater for the popular magazines is courting failure. (One of them, who has tried it, has left an honest record of his attempts and his percentage of successes.) When he, or more probably his agent, places a story with a popular magazine, the occurrence is, as far as the writer is concerned, a happy fluke. I can speak with a little experience upon this point, as I have written stories which have passed as "serious," and am not altogether a stranger to the magazines. I like "experimental" stories: I like stories of atmosphere: I like plot and situation stories: I like any kind of story, provided it is well done. I have my own private

preference, which is for the story of atmosphere and character; but, when and as the different subjects beckon, I try my hand at all. The stories I sell, and the stories I do not sell, are not greatly different in kind, nor, I think, in merit: for a plot or situation story will not please a magazine editor if its theme is unconventional, just as an "atmosphere" story will slip easily past him if he can respond to it emotionally in ways that please him. He favours plot and situation because they give him, as he would say, something to get hold of: because he is used to them: because his readers are used to them: but no amount of either will make certain themes palatable, or certain unconventionalities pass muster. A celebrated American editor said to me recently, "The editor of a big magazine may have a hundred reasons for rejecting a story, but of one thing you can be dead sure. Not one of them will be a literary reason." Nor, he might have added, will any of his possible reasons for accepting it.

No. The work of "serious" writers, when it appears in popular magazines, owes its appearance less to its artistic merits or demerits than to its subject and its manner. It is there for reasons which have little to do with literature: and our severe young critics, denying that it is literature because of its situation, are guilty of an elementary error. There are no short cuts to discernment. The short story can show masterpieces in every kind, and, in considering it as an art form, this fact must be reckoned.

II

Fashion is the enemy of art as of discernment; and fashion, plus the considerations suggested above, has brought the English short story to the state complained of in the sentences at the head of these notes. All the argument about what is or is not a short story, all the quarrelling of the critics, is

really nothing more nor less than an attempt at standardisation. The impulse to standardise is far from being a monopoly of the editors of popular magazines. For every truly creative mind there are hundreds of correct minds : minds, that is to say, which in their first impressionability are capable of receiving a new idea, but afterwards can do nothing but hold on to it, and make resemblance to it a test of the quality of everything they meet. To this school belong many of the reviewers, and (be it whispered) not a few of the authors. Moreover, the serious writer's sensitiveness can be a real danger, in that it makes him all the more liable to be influenced by the note of a major writer. Thus, though the writers, religiously pegging away as disinterested artists, have not been aware of it, the serious short story is now as full of clichés as the commercial. In some respects, it is even worse off, for fashions in thought are more insidious than parrot-cries accepted unthinkingly. The commercial writer is concerned only with parrot-cries : to thought he is, officially at any rate, a stranger. He has one aim, cash. To achieve this he must be faithful to three cardinal requirements—conformity to public opinion ; orthodoxy in reaction to experience, and particularly to emotional experience ; and the continual need to please his reader. Within these severe limits he is permitted a considerable freedom. He is allowed complete novelty of circumstance. His finished product must be cut to pattern, but it can be made of almost any material ; and technique with him is simply a means to an end.

The serious short story, on the other hand, while its pattern is free, has tended more and more to be cut from the same material. Certain themes and preoccupations, the common stock of intelligent minds, have been exploited over and over again, the only variety being the method employed. The English short story writer, whose art is originally founded

on rebellion, has become more and more preoccupied with technique. He and what he is doing have grown too big, a bulk interposed between subject and audience. The commercial writer, once he has secured his market, does not bother his head about other writers. The serious writer, reading in order to benefit his art, intensifies his preoccupation with technique, and usually to the detriment of his work. The short story has become too cerebral. It has lost spontaneity. What is wanted to-day is more passivity, an almost mediumistic attitude towards writing, the power to surrender to a subject and to be compelled by it. Control will always be necessary, of course ; but too many of our modern writers have the control without the story.

It is for this reason that I, personally, should like to see a return to sheer narrative. Narrative has been suspect to the serious writer, and, if asked why, he would probably point contemptuously to the popular magazines. The real reason is, I suspect, that, consciously or subconsciously, he feels that narrative would diminish his importance, give less scope for his art, and reduce him to the status of a mere chronicler. I am, I repeat, a lover of the short story in all its forms, and have few prejudices. I welcome experiment of every kind. At the same time, in common with the great mass of mankind, I dearly love a story in which the reader's continual question is " What happened then ? " It is only one kind of story, one kind among many ; but there are a great many excellent artists writing to-day whose work would be all the better for a strong infusion of sheer narrative. There is nothing degrading in sheer narrative, after all ! It is the basis of all story-telling, and has always been recognised as such by the greatest writers. There is no writer who need be ashamed of telling a good yarn, or who cannot find scope for his powers in the process. Naturally, there can be no single

prescription, no panacea, for the English short story, and experiments must be of every kind, including, let us hope, many which to-day are totally unforeseen: but the average serious short story does desperately need an energising tonic, something to set it *moving*: and a return to narrative would do a lot of good. It is not as if none of our best authors practised it. (Many of them do, but, unfortunately, it is not the side of their work which is generally imitated.) The majority are as much afraid of it as they are of humour. For one Coppard, whose stories are blown through by the bright wind of laughter, there are a score champing with rigid jaws some tale of tragedy. The whole art has been getting solemn and stiff. A good yarn would loosen muscles, and clear the air.

III

For the benefit of those who do not believe that sheer narrative offers scope for their technique, may I be permitted to analyse briefly a story which is just a yarn? I will not turn to the masterpieces for an example, as this would be hardly fair. Besides, I should probably offend many readers, who would maintain that certain stories by Tchekov and De Maupassant and Conrad were more than yarns. Instead, I will choose an unpretentious story by an unpretentious writer named Jack London. The story I have in mind is called—and the title is important—*The House of Mapuhi.*

Jack London wrote often hurriedly for money, and the careless generosity of his life is sometimes reflected in his writing. He was often too lazy to wait for the right word, or to care greatly how he got a paragraph down as long as he passed on to the next one. As a result, he is sadly underrated by a generation which prefers care to vigour. The best stories of Jack London, while they are immediately

palatable to the magazine public, are the work of a born story-teller with a wonderful eye and a sure sense of form. They depend upon incident rather than plot, and afford, without apparent effort or contrivance, a natural opportunity for describing the events, the scenes and characters through which the story runs.

Mapuhi, a South Sea pearl diver, has found a marvellous pearl. He will exchange it to Raoul, the young inexperienced trader, for a house, complete with verandah, kitchen, and octagon drop clock. The trader laughs at him, and offers cash. Fortified by his wife, mother, and daughter, Mapuhi refuses. News of the pearl spreads. A bigger trader, to whom Mapuhi owes for goods, comes along, sees the pearl, and pockets it, telling Mapuhi that his debts are cleared, and he will be given additional credit on the firm's books. In sorrow Mapuhi bears the reproaches of his family, as the vision of the lovely house fades from their sight.

The day, which has been overcast, turns stormy. Raoul puts back, despite the weather, to close with Mapuhi about the house. He is relieved to hear that the matter is out of his hands, for he is only agent for another ; but less pleased to hear that the pearl has been sold to Levy, a third and greater dealer, for $25,000.

The weather becomes more and more terrifying. Heavy seas roll in and shake the little atoll. The two big dealers put hurriedly to sea and run before the storm. Raoul is too late : he stays. Then there is a hurricane, and of this I can only say that a reader familiar with Conrad's *Typhoon* is under no temptation to forget Jack London's hurricane. It is a magnificent bit of natural and un-selfconscious narrative.

In the morning there is not a tree nor a house on the island, and over two-thirds of the people have perished. Mapuhi, his wife and daughter, are safe—so is Raoul.

The interest of the story now shifts to Mapuhi's old mother. She has been carried away to an uninhabited island fifteen miles distant. Lying there, awaiting death, tired of pushing away the corpses with which the sea festoons her little beach, she notices in her stupor that one of the most persistent of them has red hair. It is Levy, the big pearl dealer. She drags herself down to the water, searches the body, and finds the pearl. Inspired now with the will to live, she explores, collects coconuts, and finally discovers a case of tinned salmon. By dint of collecting all the junk she can find, she gets materials for a clumsy kind of boat. For a paddle she uses a bit of the salmon case, cutting off her hair with a piece of broken glass to make the lashings, and gnawing wedges with her teeth to fix them. After eighteen days she sets sail for home. She is weak and emaciated. She has to stop every hour and bale. When she gets within three miles of the shore a current sets westward, and she is obliged to swim. She meets a shark, who, being lazy and full-fed, plays with her before attacking. Waiting till he comes close, she pretends to attack him, and he flees. When she does reach home—when she does find the improvised shelter in which Mapuhi is living—she is taken for a ghost. But at last all are convinced, and we leave them once more discussing the House of Mapuhi, with the verandah, the kitchen, and the octagon drop clock.

The ease and natural manner of this story may well blind the casual reader to the extraordinary skill with which it is written. The first point is the title, *The "House" of Mapuhi*. This is the theme which gives unity to all the many incidents of the tale. Mapuhi is not the hero, nor Raoul, nor is Mapuhi's old mother the heroine. The hero is the house. We meet Mapuhi at first only through the trader Raoul, who is the central character till the end of the hurricane. This is a typical instance of Jack London's cunning, for Raoul, who

was sophisticated and educated, and had never before seen a hurricane, would naturally be the one character to note with curiosity all that passed, and to be articulately aware of it for the benefit of the reader. To have related the hurricane through the perceptions of Mapuhi would have been a blunder. The fact that the house is his theme protects Jack London from all the dangers attendant upon a change of interest half way through a story, and, though the reader probably does not realise why, enables him to pass over, without effort or sense of discontinuity, to a character who has hitherto been only a super. There are a hideous number of pitfalls in this story, and every one has been avoided with consummate ease. There is no apparent plot, and only one coincidence, a natural one: the washing up of Levy's body upon the island. Here is a piece of sheer narrative affording scope for sure and subtle characterisation (one will not easily forget the veteran Captain Lynch): for suspense (the approach of the storm is magnificently done): for descriptive writing (the hurricane, and Raoul's experiences when lashed to the tree): for unexpected little twists and turns of humour: for almost everything, in fact, the teller of stories could desire. *The House of Mapuhi* will stand up to many readings. A little more care in the actual writing, and it would have been a masterpiece.

IV

There are, of course, a great many writers of high distinction who have no bent for sheer narrative, and, even apart from the fatuousness of such a proceeding, I should be the last to try and ram the prescription down their throats. I am merely suggesting a return to narrative as one tonic, or one ingredient in a tonic, that might invigorate the somewhat anæmic body of the contemporary English short story.

THE SHORT STORY: NOTES AT RANDOM

There is every sign that a boom is coming, and that the public is beginning to realise the entertainment value of short stories—to put it no higher than this. An increased outlet for their work will encourage the short story writers, and, if it could so happen, an infusion of narrative strength would encourage the public, and confirm it in its liking for the form as a whole. Two things are important: one, that there shall be no lack of experiment; two, that the term short story shall be given as wide a connotation as possible. We have had too much chat about what is and what is not a short story. Such argument is academic and pointless. A short story, as Mr. Bates so truly pointed out in last month's issue, is "the most flexible of all prose forms": it can be "anything from a prose-poem without a plot or character to an analysis of the most complex human emotions"; it can "deal with any subject under the sun, from the death of a horse to a young girl's first love affair." A short story is a short piece of prose fiction. We need ask no closer definition; and all we need require is that each of these short pieces of prose fiction should have an aim worthy of an artist, and should succeed in hitting it. Plot or no plot, situation or no situation, character study or no character study, action or no action, form what you like, manner what you like, setting what you like, length anything within reason—these are our needs for the short pieces of prose fiction of the future; these, and the free extension of the term "short story" to cover them all.

H. E. BATES

The Bath

As we struggled with our bags up the little German road in the August heat, leaving the camp of English soldiers of occupation in the valley to the left of us, we were all wondering if there would be a bath at the end of the journey. And when was the end of the journey? We must have asked that question of Karl a thousand times. "Soon," he would say carelessly, "soon." But we were afraid of mentioning the bath, for at heart we all felt that we were going into some lost and legendary German world so isolated and primitive that baths would be as unknown as Englishmen.

It was beautiful country, lost and peaceful. The roadside was starred with many stiff blue chicory flowers and milky-yellow snapdragons and scarlet poppies; and the flowers drifted thinly back into hedgeless crops of potatoes and ripening wheat and rye that had old pear-trees planted among them in wide lines, the lines gapped here and there where a tree had died. Along the road itself there were again lines of pear-trees, with odd apple-trees interplanted, and the same breaks where a tree had gone. To the right, beyond the crops of corn and potatoes, the land rose gently, always a pale sand-colour, to the vineyards that gleamed a strange bluish-green in the straight sunlight.

To the left was the valley with its broad river flowing between the many-coloured crops, and the English soldiers' tents grouped by the water like chance mushrooms. The road climbed continually, always farther and farther away from that river where we might have bathed and on towards the vineyards that we never quite seemed to reach.

"Where is this village, Karl? How much farther? Can't we stop and rest? Let's stop and get some beer. Karl, let's stop."

But it made no difference to Karl. He and I walked in front, setting the pace, with chicory-flowers stuck in our buttonholes, while Wayford and Thomas came behind us, together, and after them the two brothers Williams. It was the Williams, the one like a little rosy pig and the other like some thin provincial photographer dressed to photograph a funeral, who wanted to rest continually. It seemed that they had once spent a week in Paris and had drunk champagne there; and now it gave them a sort of melancholy amusement to compare the boulevards with the little German road winding up to the vineyards, and the champagne with the lager. But Karl was deaf. The country was his native land, the little road with the poppies and chicory flowers had not changed since his childhood, and he was the prodigal returning after many years.

So he led us implacably on in that August heat until, very late in the afternoon, we came to his native village, a lost and beautiful place, full of old white houses with green jalousies and great courtyards shut off from the narrow shadowy streets by tall wooden doors, a forgotten place, as legendary as we had half-imagined it, lying up there between the forests and the vineyards like a village out of some old German fairy tale.

When we arrived there was great excitement, a sort of

explosive excitement, all the fat German fraüleins who were Karl's sisters or aunts or cousins popping off shrieks and cackles of hysterical laughter, and the heavy German men booming thunderously in their round bellies and slapping themselves and Karl on the back in their immense joy. When we were introduced there was a great shaking of hands and a babbling of voices and a running hither and thither, together with all the pantomimic signs with hands and eyes and lips that pass between men who do not speak each other's language. And over and above it all, hysterically and incredulously :

"Karl ! Karl ! Karl ! Karl ! "

From that moment our visit became a kind of festival. Day and night there was an incessant pouring of wine and coffee in that old farmhouse with the great courtyard, a babbling arrival and departure of visitors, a cracking and frizzling of a thousand eggs over the great wood fire in the dark and lofty kitchen. We lived for three days the luxurious and pampered life of a conquering army under the roofs of a conquered people. In the mornings we lazed about the courtyard in the hot sunshine, and in the afternoon walked up to the vineyards to watch the peasants thinning and spraying the vines for the last time ; or we strolled off into the forest, the breathless pine forest that shut us off from the outer world, and then came back to photograph the peasants cutting the patches of wheat and rye with ancient reapers drawn by even more ancient oxen. We could go where we liked and do what we liked and drink what we liked. We were the English, which seemed to mean that we were the favoured, the elect. Wherever we went in that village some old man or woman or child or young girl would come out to speak and laugh with us and make all the eternal pantomimic signs of gladness and friendship. If we were

tired we could walk into the nearest house and sit there and rest; and there would be wine and coffee, talk and laughter, and intense respect and a sense of quivering happiness. Everywhere there was that feeling of relief and joy that comes between two people who have quarrelled and are friends again, and want only to forget their bitterness.

But there was no bath. And perhaps because of the bath, or perhaps because the elder brother Williams had chased a litter of pigs out of the courtyard with a broomstick, we began to notice a subtle change of feeling towards us on the third day.

We were still welcome; and there was still the same flow of wine and coffee, and still the same air of great respect for us. But now we began to sense the faintest air of suspicion, of unrest, as though we had stayed too long. We began to notice that the peasants would spy on us from half-curtained windows as we walked along the streets. We noticed that the women gossiping in two's and three's became silent as we passed.

"Let's go to Berlin," the Williams kept saying. "We could at least get a bath there. Let's get away from here."

"Go," said Karl. "Do what you like."

But they were reluctant. Perhaps the fare was too much. We saw them counting their money in corners.

Then, next day, Williams the elder, made a great shine over some cream at lunch.

"This isn't cream," he whispered.

"Then what the hell is it?" said Karl.

"It's tinned milk."

Karl sat furious, too hurt and angry to speak articulately. But at last he turned to me:

"Is it cream? You tell them. You're from the country. You tell them. Is it cream or not?"

"It's lovely cream," I said.

"It's tinned milk!" said the elder Williams excitedly. "Any fool can tell that. It's tinned milk I tell you!"

Across the table the peasants were watching the scene, suspicious. We were their guests. They must have detected the note of dissatisfaction in Williams uplifted voice. Karl was miserable and furious.

"At least wait till we get outside!" he whispered. "At least do that."

The meal was finished in silence, in a silence of suspicion and unhappiness.

Afterwards, in the courtyard, it all broke out again:

"We're off to Berlin!" the Williams shouted.

"And good riddance!" shouted Karl.

"What time is there a train?"

"Find out."

"We can't speak the language."

"Learn it."

They went indoors at last to pack their bags, furious. Coming downstairs again they stood in the courtyard and pored over their little red pocket dictionary in silence, anxious, but independent.

Karl, quieter now, went to them:

"You know the nearest station is four miles off?" he said.

"We can walk," they said.

"It's a branch line."

"We know that."

"Hadn't you better wait? It's seventeen hours to Berlin."

"We're going to Paris."

Karl gave it up. Standing on the far side of the courtyard, I could see the peasants standing unrestfully at doors and windows, watching the scene. They must have sensed the cause of the quarrel, that they and their food and their ways

were no longer good enough for us, and the air was tense.

It was a wretched situation. Again Karl tried to make it easier :

" Wait till to-morrow. We'll all go then. We'll all go on to Berlin in the morning."

" We're going to Paris," said the Williams fervently.

" Wherever you're going there's no train till four o'clock."

They condescended to wait, sitting on their bags by the doorstep in the sunshine, so that every peasant going in or out of the house had to step over them. The atmosphere grew more tense and wretched.

Karl had vanished. But suddenly, ten minutes later, he came running back into the courtyard :

" A bath ! " he was shouting. " A bath ! We can have a bath."

The Williams tried to look uninterested.

" Schmidt, the richest farmer in the village, invites us all to his house to-night," said Karl, " to have a bath."

" All of us ? "

" All of us. It's a new bath. It's never been used. He's invited us over to use it for the first time. He's the only man for fifty miles round who has a bath. It's a great honour."

We were at once excited. The mosquitoes had been devilish, the heat and sweat of the days very trying, and for a long time we had ached for a bath. Moreover, the news seemed suddenly to dispel the air of suspicion created by the quarrel. Everyone began to act more freely. Only the Williams continued to sit on their suitcases in the courtyard, dismally waiting for the time when they should depart.

But at eight o'clock that evening, when we set off towards the house of Herr Schmidt, for the bath, together with all the girls and women who were Karl's sisters or aunts or

cousins, and all their fat husbands or sweethearts, we noticed that the Williams were still with us. They walked a little sheepishly, behind us or apart from us, and the peasants never spoke to them.

The bath of Herr Schmidt was already a legend. Karl translated for us the peasant's ecstascies, and now and then a man would stop and throw out his fat arms to indicate the size of the bath of Herr Schmidt, the colossal wonder of the countryside. Karl's sister Maria was very fat, and once her father paused and urged us to look upon her.

" So ! " There was great laughter. " So ! " he said again, as though to indicate that even Maria would be lost when she sat in that bath. Even Herr Schmidt, too, would be lost. Even Herr Schmidt ! There was still greater laughter.

We arrived at Herr Schmidt's house, a big farmhouse set in a spacious courtyard, just as the summer dusk was falling, and Herr Schmidt himself stood in the doorway, waiting to receive us. Seeing him, we saw at once the reason for the peasant's laughter and the bath's immensity. Herr Schmidt stood on his threshold like the traditional innkeeper in a German opera, so fat that he could scarcely waddle forward to greet us, and his laughter was so rich and powerful that it rumbled like operatic thunder.

He was in a state of great excitement, greeting us with a thousand explosive invitations to enter the house, laughing mightily whenever he spoke, waving his arms, bowing, shaking our hands with his immense obese paws until we were pained and weary.

" Ender. Pliz go in ! " he shouted delightedly. " Ender ! "

We all followed him into the house and he bowed us into the drawing-room. " Ender. Pliz come in." It was a great honour, a great honour. He was overwhelmed, overjoyed to have us bathe with him. He could think of no

greater honour. And were we in the War? We were too young? Yes? But he, Herr Schmidt, was in the War, and was wounded. Ah! but let us not talk about it. It was all over, all finished. Let us not talk about it. "Ender! Pliz come in. Pliz come in!"

He rushed away excitedly, excusing himself elaborately. Left in the drawing-room we all became conscious of a strange thing.

The drawing-room was like a boiler house. The heat was terrific, a thick steaming heat that had condensed on the walls and on the pictures and the old polished furniture. As we sat there the memory of the sultry summer evening outside seemed cool and delicious. And now and then we heard strange squeaks and gutteral rumblings overhead and about us, like the sound of water bubbling hotly in hidden pipes, and at intervals the sound increased to a great stuttering grunt, as though the pipes must burst.

But Herr Schmidt, carrying many bottles of hock under his arms, came puffing in to reassure us. Had we heard anything? Anything we might hear was just the bath water. It was just beginning to get hot. Beginning! We sat in a mute sweat of alarm at that word. Only a little while and the water would be hot and the bath would be ready. Until then, we must have a little wine. Yes? Herr Schmidt brandished the bottles excitedly.

We were too hot to speak. Herr Schmidt uncorked the bottles loudly and poured out the pale green wine. We sat about weakly, too limp from that steamy heat to talk or move. All the time the subterranean squeaks and grumblings went on in the pipes about us, like the grunting of a litter of pigs, and each time there was some louder and more ominous growling Herr Schmidt would laugh with stentorian excitement, as proud as a father at the chucklings of a new baby,

drowning the sound of the boiling water with his own enormous voice.

During all this the Williams's sat in silent discomfort, bathed in uneasy sweat. They never spoke, and the peasants sat apart from them, as though remembering the quarrel and its causes.

All the time the room grew hotter and the growlings in the pipes more alarming. When we felt that we could bear it no longer, Herr Schmidt rushed out of the room and back again and shouted that the bath was ready.

"Who'll go first?" said Karl.

But Herr Schmidt was not ready. First we must view the bath. It was after all unique, a virgin among baths, and ours were to be the first bodies to enter it. So with the peasants eyeing us enviously we all trooped out after Herr Schmidt to the bathroom.

"Ender! Pliz come in. Pliz ender!"

He bowed us into the bathroom. Inside, the heat was infernal, and there, with an immense ten-foot stove of flowered tiles built against it, was the wonder, the virgin bath. We gazed in awe. It seemed to us that that bath could have held an elephant, or that a man might have used it with safety as a boat on the high seas.

Herr Schmidt was almost hysterical with joy at our silent wonder. He dusted the tiniest flecks of dirt off the white porcelain and turned on the tap with a flourish, letting out a volcanic stream of hissing water that set all the pipes in the house growling ominously again.

We murmured in admiration, and Herr Schmidt thundered his laughter.

Ten minutes later I was standing in the bath, the water burning my very feet like acid. We had drawn lots for the bath and I was first. But the water was so hot that I could

not bear it and the water in the cold tap had grown luke warm from the violent heat of the stove. I washed myself tenderly and got out of the bath quickly and went back to the drawing-room.

And one by one the rest took their baths and came out quickly, as though they had been through fire. It happened that the Williams had drawn the last places, and by the time they went into the bathroom the grumblings and squeakings in the pipes were already dying away.

"How was it?" we said when they reappeared. They had gone in together to scrub each other down. "Was it too hot?"

"It was beautiful," they said.

They were radiant.

"Could you get down in it?" we asked. None of us had been able to sit in that infernal water.

"It was grand," was all they could say. "It was worth waiting for. It was perfect."

They were smiling, their faces pink from the fresh warm water. And as they sat down to drink the wine that Herr Schmidt had poured out for them they seemed like different men. The bath seemed to have washed away their sulkiness and misery, their air of condescension, the memory of all their petty grievances. It was so plain in their faces that even the peasants could see it.

We stayed in Herr Schmidt's house all that evening. The wine and the coffee flowed endlessly again, there was good German food, and Herr Schmidt sang songs for us. We also sang songs in return and danced heavily round the room, clumping our feet, with the German women. Even the Williams danced, and all the old feeling of suspicion, and all the deeper feeling that our countries had once been enemies, vanished completely. It was as if the bath had washed them away.

We did not leave till early morning and perhaps because of the wine there seemed to be many more of us to go home than there had been to come. The night was very still and soundless; a big summer moon half way to setting, a warm gold, in the clear and colourless sky, the corn white in the moonlight, the old pear-trees among it as still as the distant forest and the hills.

As we walked down the road we linked arms with the peasants, making a chain across the road. The girls rested their soft heads on our shoulders, and we all sang at the tops of our voices, not knowing quite what we were singing, in the common language of joy.

S. K. PADOVER

The Shadow of the Cross

Rab Meyer Rapoport was a farmer in Galicia and had three daughters. Being prosperous and pious he was held in great esteem in the village. After his wife Sarah died, Rab Meyer refused to remarry. This was a defiance of the Mosaic law which frowns upon celibacy.

"Meyer Rapoport, shame on you!" the Jewish neighbours, especially the women, constantly reproved him. "A Jew like you to stay unwedded—a disgrace!" But, having heard this for ten years and more, he merely caressed his short greyish beard and made no answer.

When he was about sixty he sold ten acres of meadow land to dower his daughter Rebecca. This impaired the productivity of his farm, but the sacrifice was small compared to the son-in-law he was getting. Rebecca's husband was the son of the rabbi from a town called Tokatschk. "Think of it!" Rab Meyer repeated over and over again. "My Rebecca is the daughter-in-law of Reb Shulim Tokatschker! Think of it—Reb Shulim Tokatschker, no less!" He couldn't quite get over the honour that came to his house and he sometimes wept from joy.

He was a holy man, Rab Meyer, and every Friday afternoon he laid down his implements, washed his face and beard in

cold water, donned his satin caftan and walked ten miles to the neighbouring town to spend a prayerful Sabbath at the rabbi's table. It was on one of these sabbatical trips that he found a wallet that contained fifty gulden. He scratched his neck meditatively, stuck the money into his boot and thought of the goodness of God, who punishes the wicked and rewards the faithful with majestic impartiality.

A bent figure came running towards Rab Meyer and sharply interrupted his meditations. The man was a Jewish pedlar, poor in earthly goods but rich in offspring numerous as the sons of Jacob. " Rab Meyer," gasped the pedlar, white and trembling " have you seen—maybe—my money. . . . It wasn't mine—I'm a ruined man. . . . Oh, please, Rab Meyer, please—! " For a swift second Rab Meyer doubted God's goodness, but his faith instantly returned. He piously closed his eyes, for he couldn't bear to see the pedlar's agonized face and burning tears, and gently said " No."

Saturday night Rab Meyer found a gendarme waiting for him in his home. " Herr Rapoport," said the officer putting his gloved hand on the trembling Jew's shoulder, " in the name of His Majesty the Kaiser I place you under arrest." Rapoport denied vehemently. He pleaded. He wept. The gendarme, a Pole, who trusted no Jew, with his brass helmet strapped under his chin, was immovable as a church.

The money was found on Rab Meyer's person, and justice was as prompt as the scandal was great. The sin of the father was visited on the children. With a father in jail, Rebecca could not in decency continue to be the wife of a rabbinical heir. She returned to her native village to face a life of lonely disgrace in common with her sisters.

A curse, the Jews said, hung over the house of Rapoport; for Rebecca was seen consorting with Stefan Gursky, a good-for-nothing drunkard. And when one Sunday morning

the church bells announced the wedding of Rebecca—now Ursula, after the famous saint who did not let the Rhenish Huns rape her—and Stefan, the Jews shook their heads and murmured, " Etzba Elokim—The Finger of God."

With Stefan installed in the Rapoport homestead, this former seat of Jewish piety became, to the Jews, a veritable den of iniquity. There were merry dances there, and drinking, and love-making. Was it any wonder that Leah soon became pregnant? The parish priest persuaded the middle-aged seducer to marry Leah, on condition that Leah join the church. Which Leah did. The youngest girl left home and disappeared from sight.

Years passed; the Rapoport affair, after having been an inexhaustible subject for moral conversation in thousands of homes and gatherings, was dying a natural death. No one knew whether Rab Meyer was still among the living, and no one cared, except possibly Rab Meyer himself, who one sharp winter afternoon turned up at his village.

Supporting himself on a cane, the aged man approached his home, stopped in front of the gate and peered in. " Ho, there! " he called hoarsely, but no one answered until he entered the yard. Then it was that Stefan, bare-headed and red-faced, opened the door and recoiled, crossing himself and muttering, " Holy Mother of Christ——! " Stefan's prematurely aged wife came out, cast one look at the Jew and fell back with a shriek. To Rab Meyer she looked like his deceased wife Sarah—may her soul rest in peace. Stonily he stared at her who was now tremblingly fingering her beads. When he made a step forward, she stretched her arms in a gesture of repulsion and fled into the house.

" Well, Jew, you have no business here. This house belongs to me now," Stefan blurted out. Rapoport turned his back on the peasant and dragged himself away. At the

gate he began to cough till his face turned green and his body like a writhing worm. He wiped his mouth with the back of an uncontrollably trembling hand.

He walked away, slipping occasionally, always looking down at the blinding whiteness of the snow, shimmering green under the stars, escaping the cold that clutched his bones, escaping the cold that wracked his heart, escaping the falling snow that threatened to bury him. He was holding a solitary race with God.

At Devil's Creek, which was reputed haunted, the old Jew suddenly halted. An invisible hand was gripping his knees. He turned: a desert of snow. There were dark, menacing tree trunks lining the frozen creek. "Away you Evil Ones—Back to your lairs, Impure Ones!" he cried, but could not open his mouth. His soul was torn with the effort to exorcise the Unmentionable Ones, but his lips were frozen. He felt himself pulled forward, he saw the distorted shapes of the naked trees bend toward him, and in an agony of despair he wrenched his mouth open and uttered a terrifying "Shemo Yisroel—Hear, O Israel, God our God, God one God——!" Then his body was released and he ran from the terrible spot; but he slipped and fell and lay there and prayed.

Again and again he raised himself, and again and again his knees gave way. The pain in his side tormented him to madness, goading the last spark of energy that was in him. A shaking hand clutched the cane. The twisted body raised itself; tottered on. The fields were snow-swept and desolate, but in the distance there was a dim light.

In anguish he reached the heaven-sent light—and Oh, Merciful Jehovah—it was a wayside shrine where some pious soul had lighted a kerosene lamp over the head of the Saviour.

The two enemies met, the two livid faces confronted each other. The old Jew's breath came through his throat like the

whistle of a reed pipe, and with his swollen hands he clasped the cane and stared at the Man on the Cross. The pity in that face did not move the old man, nor its despair.

" Messiah——? " the Jew flung his sobbing taunt. " Dumb God——Meshummed——! " On Jesus's cheeks there were snow-flakes, and to Rab Meyer they looked like tears. It maddened him. " Defamer of Jehovah——. Source of all evil——! " The wind swished mournfully. Rab Meyer raised his stick ; flung it at the face of Him who was nailed to the cross. It tilted the lamp ; kerosene dripped down on the Jew who was frantically climbing the cross and beating it with his fists. He could not tear Christ from his mooring. The lamp fell on the kerosene-soaked Jew. He burned ; he screamed. Hands clawed the crucified figure : a figure of stone. The Jew gripped and embraced the feet on the cross, and so writhing, he burned to death beneath the pitying gaze of the Saviour.

REARDEN CONNER

The Friends

MARMADUKE pricked up his ears as he approached Mehaffey's farm gate. He was expecting his old friend, Ben the sheep-dog, to emerge from the yard and run with him down to the pasture field at the foot of the next hill.

A knowledgeable jennet was Marmaduke. His back was covered with many a weal caused by his master's heavy ash plant. His legs were thin from the pulling of innumerable loads of turf from the bog a mile beyond the village. But his eye was clear and bright and his long head had a proud set, a " cock to it " as the knowing old-timers who lounged against the wall of Noonan's pub. said on many an occasion.

Every evening his master released him from the shafts of the cart in the little yard of his cottage on the edge of the village. And every evening—except in winter—Marmaduke galloped out of the yard joyously and down to the Mehaffey pasture field where he was permitted to graze away such idle hours as came to him. His master did not have to accompany him. He knew every inch of the way to the little low wall which bounded the pasture field. Nor had anyone to bother about such matters as opening gates where he was concerned. He leaped the wall as gallantly as any hunter. Three farm horses grazed in the same field. And although on summer

evenings they tore across the sward vigorously at the slightest provocation, no one of them ever dreamt of jumping the wall and straying along the road.

Each evening Ben, the Mehaffey sheep dog, would wait for his pal just inside the wide iron farmyard gate. He would sit sedately on his haunches, his tongue lolling out, on the alert for the first rattle of Marmaduke's hooves. Then out between the bars of the gate he would leap to bark joyously as his friend approached. Side by side they would trot along the flat road, up the hill, down the incline, and so to the wall of the pasture field.

It was great fun on summer evenings. The Mehaffey ducks were usually on their way back from the pond at that hour. One by one they would come along the earthen footpath rocking from side to side, jabbering incessantly. After them would waddle the black drake who hated Ben with a hatred blacker than his own head. What fun for Marmaduke and Ben to worry that drake! Marmaduke would skirmish round in circles, making a terrific clatter on the sun-baked road with his steel-shod hooves. Ben would bark with all the vigour of his old lungs. The drake would stand in the centre of the road with eyes glistening like highly polished beads, making short jabs with his beak at thin air. "Gug-gug-gug-g-u-u-g!" he would say with infinite scorn in his tones. And his women-folk would stand around and chorus, "Quack-quack! Quack-quack! Quack-qu-ack - - qu-a-a-ack!"

At the foot of the hill the two friends sometimes encountered Widow Twomey's flock of geese. There was a gander attached to this flock who regarded himself as a veritable sultan. His wives were all snow-white with beaks even redder than Ben's tongue. He, himself, was a dirty grey with a browny-yellow beak. All the small boys in the

village were terrified of him. At the merest sound of a footstep he would begin to make a terrible to-do in case the passer-by dared to steal or molest one of his snow-white wives.

Marmaduke was not very happy about his meetings with this gentleman. Nor was Ben for that matter. The gander would advance to meet them with a brazenness that ill became his size. He would stretch out his long neck and give peculiar hissing sounds, "Hawh-ha-wh!" Twice he had pecked Marmaduke's legs. And once he had flown at Ben's head and had given him a nasty wound just below the eye after the old dog had snapped a feather from his tail. For days after Ben had felt very crestfallen.

Almost everything was fun for those two pals. The frogs hopping on the edge of the pond, the birds fluttering in the hawthorns along the bank, their own reflections in the water. And on wet days they ran along with their bodies steaming while the soft summer rain sheeted against their faces and made long matted wisps of Marmaduke's mane and of Ben's shaggy coat. They loved to shake their bodies and to spray the glittering drops over one another.

They would climb the hill slowly side by side. But once at the top, Ben would take the lead and go tearing off in front of Marmaduke, barking wildly. This sometimes annoyed Marmaduke. He wanted to run as well as Ben, but the hill was steep and he felt when he moved too quickly that his hindquarters itched to fall down over his head. In his young days he had lived near a village ten miles away and there had been many steep hills in the neighbourhood. Then he had not worried about the weight of his hindquarters. Now he was old. But Ben was old, too. That was the humiliating part of it.

* * *

Marmaduke pricked up his ears. Ben had not yet appeared from the farmyard. Such a thing had never happened before. Now he was almost level with the gate and no sign yet of that shaggy form.

He came abreast of the yard-gate. He saw Ben crouching down on the cobblestones. A few hens were pecking at grain lazily around him. His head was nodding on his brown-and-white chest as though he were in deep sleep. Marmaduke neighed plaintively. Ben's eyes opened wide ; his tail wagged. He came haltingly towards the gate, climbed between the bars, and took his accustomed position beside his friend.

Marmaduke was puzzled. There were no glad barks this evening. The ducks and the drake were passed and ignored. The shaggy body drooped almost to the ground. The tail hung loosely. Marmaduke looked down in wonderment at his friend. From time to time Ben glanced up at him with sad wide eyes in which no gleam of happiness lurked. Marmaduke was astonished to discover that he could quite easily outdistance his pal. In fact, he had to lessen his stride so that Ben could keep up with him.

They climbed up the hill. Ben panted in great harsh gasps. Saliva hung down in a long string from his mouth. At the top of the hill Marmaduke set himself out to mince his steps as usual for the descent. He was surprised to find that Ben did not run proudly down before him, but still lagged behind. For once he was beating his old friend, beating him hollow. Half-way down the hill he decided to let himself go, even if only to awaken Ben from his coma. He galloped to the bottom of the hill and shot off along the flat road towards the pasture field. He heard Ben give one short quick yap behind.

Fifty yards along the road he drew up and looked around. Ben had not reached the foot of the hill. He seemed to be

resting, Marmaduke galloped back. Ben lay on his stomach with his muzzle pressed down between his front paws. Froth was dripping from his lips on to the dusty road. His eyes were tightly shut. Marmaduke poked at the brown body. It swayed slightly, but was otherwise unresponsive. He curled back his lips and with his strong teeth gripped Ben's ear delicately and gave it a gentle tug. The body rolled over on to its side and the legs stuck out like hedge-kippins.

Then Marmaduke understood. His ears shot up. He drummed on the hard road with his forelegs and made whinnying sounds. In the distance he saw a woman walking slowly towards the hill. He ran down to her, neighing shrilly—his long uncombed tail fanning out on the breeze. But the woman was scared at sight of him and clambered with all speed over the wayside ditch.

MARIAN BOWER

Charlotte and an Exquisite

CHARLOTTE turned the key in the Rectory door.

She stood a moment looking at the monstrosity of red brick, built some fifty years ago, in what was referred to at the epoch as the ecclesiastic style; then she followed Abel Smart, who, with the last of her belongings on his barrow, was disappearing through the Rectory gate.

Ever since Charlotte could remember she had been curate, cook, nurse and secretary to papa, the Rector. The Rector was lofty about money matters. It was not, he said, for a man in Holy Orders to serve at tables. None the less, so Charlotte found, the butcher and the baker had to be paid, so she filled up such times as remained from her miscellaneous duties by sundry devices for turning an extra penny. She was hardly more than a child when she began to sell a dozen or so eggs to the local huckster to meet the case when her shoes were more than usually down at the heels, or the need for a new pair of gloves was urgent, and papa, appealed to, referred her to St. Paul on feminine extravagance. By chance, since violets bloomed early under the south wall in the Rectory garden, Charlotte received an order for them; and violets paid so well, that to violets was added lavender.

The village had long cherished a decided opinion as to the

relative merits of Charlotte and " the Reverent " ; so when the Rector was gathered to his forebears, Farmer Hodges suggested that, as he did not want to occupy the house belonging to his Blue Doors Farm, it would make a nice home for Charlotte. Mrs. Pitch, though she had seven children under ten, insisted on scrubbing every floor in the little house, and Abel Smart, not only whitewashed the walls and ceilings, but declared that since he had moved Charlotte's belongings in his spare time, she didn't owe him " noffen " for that little job.

Mrs. Hodges was waiting at Blue Doors when Charlotte appeared. Old Abel was asked to stay to tea, but it was Giles Argent who, unbidden, took on himself to pour out. Charlotte, he said, must be waited on, as if she were a queen, at the first meal in her new home.

Mrs. Hodges finished her tea somewhat abruptly, and said she'd best be getting back. Old Smart passed his sleeve over his mouth, and sidled away with a twist of his long upper lip ; and when he overtook Mrs. Pitch he confided to her that it " beat him wholly how Miss, with all her sense, had come to take up with a man what looked for all the world like a chiney image on a mantel shelf."

Charlotte and Giles were left alone. A sense of that fact came over her and reduced her to confusion, but when Giles began to pile up the cups and saucers on the tray as if he intended to take them into the scullery and wash them up, Charlotte demurred.

" You can't do all these by yourself," declared Giles. (Mercy, the fifteen years' old handmaiden could not arrive until the next morning.)

" All these ! Four cups and four saucers ! " retorted Charlotte, and she endeavoured to speak in the off-hand fashion of bygone days.

She took the tray from Giles, added—"I want to be by myself. Please leave me."

"It is for the queen to give her commands: for her faithful subject to obey," answered Giles.

Then, when Charlotte was alone, she drew the arm chair round to where she could look out of the window with her bodily eyes, and looked back over certain episodes in her life with the eyes of her mind.

Giles Argent turned up in the village the previous summer, and to put it mildly, had created a sensation. He was tall, he was well set up, he had eyes as blue as a summer sky; and not only hair as yellow as guinea gold, but it grew in what the young and enthusiastic of the female sex described as "wholly beautiful waives."

When first Giles drifted into the Rectory, Charlotte looked askance at him. She had no time for anything so ornate. But Giles would not be dislodged. He appeared when Charlotte was in a hurry to get off the flowers for her orders by post, and was deft at tying up boxes. He turned up when the eggs to be sorted were unusually numerous and was soon as good as Charlotte herself at grading them. He took to paying the Rectory a visit in the evening, and after Charlotte went to the expense of getting out the piano tuner from the nearest town, Giles sang to her.

Originally, Giles spoke of his stay as if it were only to be for a week or two, then for a month or two.

The autumn came: the winter came. Early in the New Year, the Rector was laid low with bronchitis. It was at this crisis that Charlotte knew that Giles had changed from being a nice boy, years younger than herself, into a man who wished her to realise that he was paying her attention. She contracted as an anemone contracts before a hostile touch. She was not, as she pointed out to herself, of a

clinging habit. There had never been a masculine element in her life, and she was not inclined to give place to anything so disturbing now. Besides, though Giles was far more companionable than most young men, the woman who mates with a man some years younger than herself always rides for a fall.

Giles only laughed ; said he adored her for being so starchy, and went on being at hand when he was wanted. To be sure, when the village gave itself over to the excitement of burying the Rector " with black gloves and ale," Giles was absent. The triviality of funeral trappings, as he expressed it, jarred on his sense of the mystery of the Beyond.

He gave Charlotte a fortnight in which to realise that she was her own mistress, and lonely; and came back in time to hear that the Rector had left behind him (after Government exactions and lawyers' fees were accounted for) close on two hundred pounds a year, and a further three hundred pounds in the bank, all of which, since she was his only child, came to Charlotte.

This income, thought Charlotte, as she sat alone in the little white room—especially since her time would be all her own now, and there was scope for development, both with the poultry and the flowers—would provide an ample living for one.

But for two ?

Somehow it never occurred to her that Giles might contribute.

For two !

Giles Argent was twenty six, and she . . . well, she was over thirty, which really meant she was nearer forty.

The next moment, she recollected that Giles had impressed on her that a man was as old as he felt, a woman as old as she looked.

Charlotte and Giles Argent were married six weeks later, and at least one of her illusions was dispelled before she returned to Blue Doors.

Her time was not her own. It was "Come here and do this or that for me, Lotta." She was expected to come at once, and to stay some time.

In the first flush of the honeymoon, Giles put it to his "angel of a wife" that it was essential for a perfect understanding that mine should be thine, and thine mine.

But Charlotte—she was growing accustomed to being called Lotta, since Giles said Charlotte made him think of a fat frau—was more dismayed than she would admit when she found that Giles wished her to arrange with the bank that either of them might draw cheques on what he called their "joint account."

At present, as Giles was the first to acknowledge, his contribution to that joint account was under fifty pounds; but then, he added, that was a matter easy to put right. Could he not paint a picture, sing a song, or write a book?

Charlotte began to say that she had never seen any indication of either painting a picture or writing a book, but Giles cut her short. He brought his own blue cushion and put it down at her feet.

He laid his head on her lap.

"Now read to me, dearest," he insisted, and Charlotte, who knew that she ought to be making out the weekly invoices, let her hand rest on his golden head, and promised herself she would get up an hour earlier the next morning and have all the accounts fastened into their envelopes before Giles appeared at the top of the stairs and called out to Mercy or somebody (i.e., Charlotte in practice) to bring up two cans of hot water, and let it be hot, for his bath.

* * *

"Lotta, Carlotta, Lotchen! Love of my heart! Surely, you aren't going to show a narrow mind," expostulated Giles, when his wife discovered that heated tongs had more than a little to do with the ripple round his head.

"I worship beauty," Giles told her, "but more still I worship fitness. Now, look at me. Even you must confess that this undulation gives my head just the befitting Greek touch. Simplicity is your style, my dear, but it isn't mine. If you started frizzing your hair, I should shudder—you'd do it so damned badly," he added under his breath.

He took Charlotte by the shoulders.

"Smile, Lotta, smile. Monument of middle class propriety, smile and be human. If you don't smile," he went on, "I'll go down on my knees when Mercy brings in my coffee and tell her I'm begging my life from you. It would be quite true. I am begging my life from you. How could I exist, if my beloved didn't see eye to eye with me? Harmony is essential to your Giles, my Lotta; almost as essential as beauty. So smile, and understand."

Charlotte gave in; but she said he should not have married an ordinary working woman with plain working principles.

Giles would not have that either. His Lotta was not an ordinary woman. She was a queen; the Queen of his Heart. But he did wish she would not drag in anything so "stuffy" as principles. Principles were bogies invented by the narrow-minded to frighten away enjoyment.

The next awkward moment came when Giles, who appeared to take less interest in the poultry than he had done in the old Rectory days, was induced to assist in an emergency at sorting eggs, and Charlotte was driven to telling him that he was including eggs in grade one only big enough for grade two.

Giles asked quite roughly what she meant.

Charlotte looked at him in amazement.

That surly tone from Giles!

Giles turned the matter off with a laugh. How could Adonis be expected to show commercial discrimination when he was side by side with his Daphne?

Charlotte, who had managed ever since she had mastered words of four letters to read more than would have seemed possible, felt that the allusion, besides being a little mixed, hardly applied; but she accepted the excuse, and regraded the eggs.

That winter, Charlotte was laid low by influenza. Giles had a great deal to say against her going across the yard to the outhouse on cold nights to see if the lamp of the "foster mother" in the incubator was burning properly. He would do it himself. If not, then Mercy should.

For a week, the arrangement, according to Giles, worked all right. He turned out once. Mercy the other six nights. Then Mercy's half day intervened, and the next morning the lamp under the foster mother was out.

Charlotte was faced with a serious loss.

"Giles," she expostulated. "What were you doing to let the lamp go out?"

"My dear! I didn't do anything," answered Giles.

"You don't mean you didn't go out to see if it wanted more oil!" Charlotte exclaimed. "You knew Mercy wasn't here, and that I relied on you."

"But, my Lotta, my angel," said Giles, "the wind blew cold, and the fire it was warm, and your devoted subject liked not to shiver in the blast of a frosty night."

"Do you realise," asked Charlotte, "that the loss of those chickens will entirely spoil the profit of the next quarter!"

"Possibly," answered Giles. "But if there is one thing I am determined about, it is that we will not allow mere

money matters to intrude on the serenity of our life together."

"We have spent more than we ought ever since we came back," Charlotte declared. "Each week expenses go higher. If I don't make the poultry pay, and pay well, we can't go on living here."

"Ridiculous!" answered Giles.

But for once Charlotte kept to her point.

"Very well, then," said Giles. "If you will insist on looking on marriage as a commercial arrangement, I will make up the loss of your precious chickens. I suppose," and he sighed, "that no one could hope to go on for ever living in our delicious *pays du tendre*, but since you led me into it, must it be you, my Lotta, to drive me out? Very well," repeated Giles, as Charlotte only waited, looking oddly at him, "since you evidently wish it, I will put my shoulder to the wheel,"

"What will you do?" asked Charlotte.

"Do!" Giles paused; then his face cleared. "As I said before. Paint a picture, sing a song, write a book."

"The picture isn't begun, so far as I know," returned Charlotte, "and the book——"

"You pain me!" cried out Giles. "You speak of Art—of my Art—as if it had no value, save in terms of pounds, shillings and pence."

The morning post came in.

The letters never reached Blue Doors until nearly eleven o'clock. Amongst them to-day was one addressed in a sprawly feminine hand for Charlotte.

"It's from Mrs. Hibbert," she said. "I do hope she's paying her bill this time. I wrote last week and told her I couldn't go on sending eggs if she let the account run on any longer."

"My dear! Wasn't that rather tradesman-like of you?" asked Giles.

Charlotte opened the letter.

"No cheque again," she said.

"How much is it she owes you?" asked Giles.

"It's over ten pounds," said Charlotte.

"Ten pounds! You were never such an idiot as to let a woman of her kind have ten pounds' worth of things on tick!" exclaimed Giles.

"I was going to stop the account at the end of last month," Charlotte began, "but you said——"

"Oh! for goodness' sake, don't remind me of what I said," complained Giles. "It's clear enough that this Mrs. Hibbert of yours is trying to get out of paying. Ten pounds!" he went on. "You'd think we had money to burn. Fancy letting that woman run up a bill for ten pounds!"

Suddenly Charlotte felt tearful. She had often been annoyed, but she did not remember when she had shed a tear. Tears were not in her line.

"There's no pleasing you," she cried out. "You are always talking about rising superior to money, but it seems you can be just as cross when money does not come in as Papa used to be when I had to ask him for a cheque."

Giles dropped the paper on to the floor.

"I think," he said in an icy voice, "it would be well if I went at once to do my share of our daily toil. I will go and dig in the garden. The approach to the good red earth (it was of the average brown, but Giles always described it as red) may heal the smart of your distressingly crude reproaches."

Charlotte let him go.

Her mind went back to Mrs. Hibbert's bill.

"I ought to have known better than to have taken any notice of what Giles said," she told herself.

If she meant that, really meant that she ought not to take notice of Giles, either as a husband or an oracle, then what had come to her?

It was less than a year since she gave herself to Giles because he seemed to open the way to a finer, higher life. Now, since once she had given way to plain speaking, truth had yet more to say to her. Giles's fine sentiments were only a pose. In reality he was selfish, he was lazy, he was self-indulgent.

Then, since being a woman she was very much a woman, she began to hurt herself, that, out of her pain, she might make a halo for her lost illusions.

The years, she told herself, had found her out. She and Giles were of different generations. Her sober middle age could not keep pace with his gay youthfulness; her waning charms—if charms she had ever had—were jealous of his compelling irresponsibility.

There was a china figure above her writing bureau. Charlotte valued it, not only for its intrinsic beauty, but because it came to the Rectory when the mother she had loved as a very little child, was married.

Now, the sight of it brought back the look in her mother's eyes, a look half fearful, half disappointed, entirely sad. Would her own eyes—they were said to recall her mother's—soon come to have that expression in them?

Charlotte shook herself. The early Victorian wife had wilted in the Rectory. The last thing she intended was to fade out of life at Blue Doors. She dropped self-pity, she dropped self-torture. She returned to truth. The disparity in years was a drawback, but it was not a determining cause. Giles had failed her because to speak high and act low

was his way of making existence easy for himself.

Charlotte bustled into the garden. It was time the roses were disbudded. Roses, for the market, were of double value if they were single blooms on a two foot stem. Then she glanced across to the violet bed. Giles was not digging it up for the autumn planting. She peeped over the rambler hedge. Giles was not forking round the dahlias. Charlotte suppressed a shrug of her shoulders, and concluded that it would only be a waste of time to go and see if he were lounging in the hammock.

It was not until the hour for lunch drew near, that Giles sauntered into view, with what, to judge by its lemon cover, was a French novel, under his arm.

"What an awful sight you've made of yourself," he complained, as Charlotte and he met. "For heaven's sake, powder your face before you begin lunch. I've told you before that I can't eat when I see a female countenance as red as beetroot opposite me."

"My beloved! My dearest dear," began Giles a week later. "Our little difference, hardly of opinion, but certainly of our respective points of view, has left me with the impression that a *soupcon* of distrust has grown upon your heart. That must be removed. I must prove myself. You implied a doubt of my ability to paint a picture, to write a book. I feel that I must leave you for a space, for as much as a month, perhaps for two; and when I come back I shall hope to convince you that out of my voluntary deprivation of your sweet companionship has grown a work of art."

* * *

Charlotte looked up from a letter she had just read. Giles had been away, and Giles had returned unexpectedly the

previous evening; but as yet he had said nothing about the promised work of art.

"I wonder why I am wanted at once," Charlotte said, more to herself than to Giles.

"Who wants you?" asked Giles.

His eyes darted down to the envelope on the floor.

"You've heard from the bank," Giles exclaimed.

"From Mr. Delcombe," answered Charlotte. "He has written to me himself. He says he wants to see me at once on a private matter. What ever can he want to see me about in such a hurry?"

"Now, don't grow two ugly wrinkles between its pretty gray eyes," cautioned Giles. "Smile, my beloved! my Lotta, my Lotchen. I hate that severe face. Throw Mr. Delcombe into the waste paper basket, and let us celebrate my return by banishing all thought of business in general, and him in particular."

"But I must answer the letter," said Charlotte.

"What you really must not do, dear wife," Giles told her, "is to keep that nasty disturbed look on your face. Fussy old fool! Why does he want to interfere!"

"Did you think Mr. Delcombe might write to me?" asked Charlotte quickly.

"Not I," answered Giles. "That's just the one thing I did not think he would do."

"You sound quite vexed," went on Charlotte.

"Vexed!" echoed Giles. "Haven't I told you before that the only thing which vexes me is when I see you let petty suspicions warp your beautiful nature. You know you're the sweetest woman alive, if only you wouldn't be practical. Being practical, dear child, is a woman's name for the nagging at fastidiousness for not being commonplace."

Charlotte stood, considering.

" Why are you looking at me like that ? " Giles exclaimed.

" I was wondering what was the real reason for your being annoyed that Mr. Delcombe had written to me."

" Now you misunderstand me," declared Giles. "Annoyed ! With Mr. Delcombe ! Why should I be ? But I must admit, I did think it just a little uncalled for that a meddling bank manager should summon my wife into his presence ! "

" Mr. Delcombe isn't an ordinary bank manager. He has been kind to me ever since I was a girl," answered Charlotte. " He is always doing kind things, not for me only, but for anyone who, he thinks, can't look after themselves, or is being taken in."

" How officious of him," muttered Giles.

The next morning Charlotte walked to the 'bus and took her seat in it for the market town.

" Tell Mr. Argent, when he comes down," she said to Mercy, as she left Blue Doors, " that I have gone to see Mr. Delcombe."

Mr. Delcombe received her in his private office.

" My dear lady," he began. " You and I have known each other for a very long time. I trust, if you don't feel that I am justified in the step I have taken, that you will bear with me, and forgive me."

" What do you want to tell me ? " Charlotte exclaimed.

" Mr. Argent and yourself," said Mr. Delcombe, " agreed to draw in common on your account. I call it your account," he went on, when Charlotte looked as if she wished to put in a word, " because you had three hundred pounds in your current account when you married, and Mr. Argent only put in forty-three. Mr. Argent told me himself that he intended to make his contribution equal to yours. That has never been done ; and now I should like you to see your joint pass book."

He brought it out, put it before Charlotte.

She glanced down it. Looked into the lined, kindly face watching her.

"Two hundred pounds has been drawn out of the account in the last two months!" she gasped.

"By Mr. Argent," said Mr. Delcombe.

Charlotte drew up her shoulders.

"It's all right," she said. "Mr. Argent only wants the money for a few days."

The white haired man seated opposite her, answered her alarmed eyes, not her jaunty voice.

"You couldn't," he said, "you couldn't give me fresh instructions now? Your present agreement says 'to draw mutually until further notice.'"

It was a little time before Charlotte answered.

"I will write to you after I have seen my husband," she said.

When Charlotte got back to Blue Doors, Mercy met her with a note.

It was from Giles.

"I have had a telegram," he wrote, "asking me to go up to London at once. It is from a well-known picture dealer. I will not bore you with his name, as I know it would convey nothing to you, since you take no interest in art. But you may care to know that the wire can only mean that he has sold the picture I left with him."

Giles had gone, and Giles, Charlotte knew, would not come back.

She did not believe one word about the picture, and she wondered, since the rest of her bank balance would not be available, what he would live on this time.

The china figure!

Gone from the top of the writing bureau!

Her mother's china figure was missing.

Giles had taken with him the one thing she possessed which would turn into money.

Quickly, Charlotte walked across to where Giles's " own " cushion was still propped up on a stool by the side of the fireplace. She took it, dropped it over the back of the sofa, pushed the sofa up against the wall until it crushed the soft blue frills.

Giles had gone, and with him had gone her illusion ; but she was not going to pity herself. On the contrary, though she felt it was hardly seemly in a deserted wife, she came near to being amused, as she looked back and saw that Giles had played her as neatly as an angler plays a fish. Why be resentful because he had done the job he set himself to do so well ? The mistake was her own. She had asked for fine feelings from a trivial nature.

She drew round her own chair, sat looking into the evening, just as she did the night when she decided to marry Giles Argent.

She had loved him ; or rather, she had loved the man she imagined him to be. That love was dead ; but for a little she had walked through the enchantment of what Giles always referred to as the *pays du tendre*. That is an experience which, she knew, leaves no woman quite where it found her. Now she had the choice of whether she would profit by it, or wilt under it.

The tears came into her eyes. Resolutely she blinked them away.

She rose, went into the garden.

Before she came back into the cottage, she had got through most of the work which, because of her visit to Mr. Delcombe, had been left undone that day.

And when Charlotte went to bed, she slept.

BORIS PILNIAK

The Assassination[1]

It was dawn. The summons of the factory syrens answered one another across the city. In byways lingered a grey fog, made up of night, mist and frost. Slowly it wreathed away into the newborn day. It foreshadowed a day leaden, dreary, drowned in drizzle.

It was the hour when the printing-presses of the big daily newspapers were running off their last editions. Swarms of urchins, with their arms full of bundles, dashed out of the dispatch-rooms and scattered through the streets. One after the other, they took up positions at the deserted street-corners. They started shouting at the tops of their voices, as though they wanted to clear those throats of theirs that had to bellow all day long.

"The Revolution in China!"

"Arrival of Commander-in-Chief Gavrilov!"

"Illness of Commander-in-Chief Gavrilov!"

It was also the hour when a train, coming from the South, entered the Southern station. It was a special train. At the end of it a blue saloon-coach glimmered dimly: a silent coach, with sentries posted on its running-boards and its window-blinds pulled down.

[1] Translated by Warre B. Wells

The train emerged from the darkness of night, out of the steppes where winter had just succeeded summer. It glided under the glass roof of the station slowly, furtively. It stopped in a siding. The platform was deserted. But, near the exits, groups of soldiers, with green stripes on their uniforms, happened to be lounging.

Three officers, with lozenge-shaped tabs on their sleeves, strode towards the saloon-coach. They returned the sentries' salute and stopped at the door. One of the sentries whispered something inside and, after a minute or two, the three officers climbed the steps and disappeared. Light was switched on in the coach. Two military fitters flitted round it. They were installing a telephone connection.

Somebody else approached. He was a man wearing a rather shabby overcoat, long out of fashion, and a fur cap with earpieces. The man saluted nobody, and nobody saluted him.

" Tell Nicholas Ivanovitch that Popov is here," he said.

The sentry slowly raised his eyes, looked Popov up and down, studied his worn boots, and replied at his leisure.

" The comrade Commander-in-Chief is not up yet."

Popov smiled in friendly fashion at the Red soldier.

" Well, my young friend, just go and tell him that Popov is here, would you ? "

The Red soldier went. He returned. Then Popov climbed the steps and entered the coach. Its blinds were still drawn ; its lights were still lit. Night lingered in it.

On the table, beside the lamp, an open book lay next to a plate, with some semolina leavings on it. In front of the plate lay the open holster of an automatic revolver, with its little strap curling in spirals. At the opposite end of the table stood some uncorked bottles. The three officers with the tabs on their sleeves were sitting in leather armchairs along

the sides of the coach. They sat in embarrassed stiffness, with their portfolios in their laps. They said nothing.

Popov went behind the table, took off his coat and cap, laid them beside him, picked up the open book and glanced through it. A steward with an impassive face, indifferent to whatever might be going on in the world, came in and set the table. He relegated the bottles to a corner, swept some pomegranate peelings into a little tray, spread a cloth on the table, and arranged on it a glass with a metal holder, a plate of stale bread, and an egg-cup. Then he brought in two eggs in a saucer, a salt-cellar, and bottles of condiment.

He pulled back the curtain a little and looked out, rolled up the window blinds, and switched off the light. The autumnal morning, a grey morning, steeped in melting frost, crept into the saloon. Under that wan light all the faces looked yellow. The dim, watery day was like ichor.

An orderly made his appearance at the door beside the steward. The telephone was working by now, and a bell rang.

The Commander-in-Chief came out of his sleeping quarters into the saloon. He was a man of medium height, with broad shoulders and long, fair hair, brushed back. His crumpled tunic, with four stripes on the sleeve, made out of the same green fabric as those of the soldiers, fitted him badly. His high, spurred boots were perfectly polished; but their down-trodden heels bore witness to their long, weary marches.

He was the man whose name evoked all the enthusiastic heroism of the civil war; all the thousands, the tens of thousands, the hundreds of thousands of men who marched behind him; all the thousands, the tens of thousands, the hundreds of thousands of dead, of wounded, of maimed; the cold and the heat of marches; the thunder of guns, the

whistling of bullets and night winds; and camp-fires in the night, and victories and retreats, and, above all, death.

He was the man whose name was haloed with legend. It told of all his campaigns, his military genius, his matchless gallantry, his tireless tenacity. He was the man who had the right, and the will, to send people to fight their fellow-men and kill them, and be killed in their turn.

This man, medium of height and broad of shoulder, who came into the saloon had the rather tired face of a scholar. He walked briskly. His gait denoted both the riding man and the civilian. There was nothing of the soldier about it.

The three generals stood to attention. The Commander-in-Chief halted in front of them. He did not offer his hand to them; but he waved it in a way which gave them leave to stand at ease. Then, standing in front of them, the Commander-in-Chief received their reports.

One by one they stepped forward. One by one they reported: "In the army under my command . . . in the service of the Revolution . . ."

The Commander-in-Chief did not seem to pay much attention. Still, he shook hands with each of them in turn. Then he sat down at the table. The steward appeared behind him, and poured tea out of a shining teapot into the glass. The Commander-in-Chief cracked an egg.

"How's it going?" he asked, quite simply.

One of the three Red generals told him, unofficially, the latest news. Then he asked, in his turn:

"And how are you, Comrade Gavrilov?"

The Commander-in-Chief's face looked queer for a moment. It was in an odd tone that he answered:

"I'm just back from the Caucasus. They treated me there —I'm better now." He paused. "I'm quite all right now." He paused again. "Tell them I don't want any formal

reception—no honours, nothing like that. . . ." He paused once more. "You may go, comrades."

The three officers stood up. The Commander-in-Chief kept his seat. He shook hands with the three of them again. They went out without a word.

When the Commander-in-Chief came into the saloon, Popov had not saluted him. He took the book up again, turned away from the Commander-in-Chief, and started reading it. The Commander-in-Chief looked at him out of the corner of his eye. That was all. It was as though he had not really noticed Popov.

But the moment the three generals had gone, Gavrilov spoke to Popov. Still he did not greet his visitor. He spoke as though they had parted only the day before.

"What will you have, Aliocha—tea or wine?"

But Popov had no time to reply. The orderly made his appearance again.

"Comrade Commander-in-Chief," he reported, "your car has been unloaded. . . . Reports are beginning to come in. . . . A report has just arrived from Department No. 1: a secret report from the secretary-general himself. . . . A room at Headquarters is ready for the Comrade Commander-in Chief. . . . There are any number of telegrams and letters of congratulation awaiting the Comrade Commander-in-Chief. . ."

The Commander-in-Chief dismissed him. He told his orderly that he was going to say where he was, in the saloon.

Without awaiting Popov's reply, the steward had put both a tea-glass and a wine-glass on the table. Popov left his corner, and sat down beside the Commander-in-Chief.

"And how are you, my dear Nicholas?" he asked affectionately. He might have been talking to a brother.

"I'm quite well. I'm all right. But still you may have to

mount a guard of honour over my coffin," replied Gavrilov. His tone was half serious, half joking.

Popov and Gavrilov were united by an old friendship. They had been clandestine revolutionaries together, they had worked together in the same factory, in the distant days of their youth. They had both started their hectic careers as weavers in the textile industry at Oriekhovo-Zouiewsk. Then they had been imprisoned almost simultaneously, at Bogorodsk. After that, the typical life of professional revolutionaries had begun for them; exile, escape, activity in hiding, prison at Tagansk, second exile, second escape, Paris, Vienna, Chicago.

Then came the dark clouds of the year 1914: Brindisi, Salonika, Roumania, Kieff, Moscow, Petrograd. Next followed the turmoil of the year 1917, the Smolny Institute, the October Days, the cannonade in front of the Kremlin at Moscow. Now one of them had become Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army at Rostov on the Don, and the other "president of the proletarian nobility"—so Rykov put it to Foula jokingly.

For one of them it meant war, battle, the command of guns, of men, and of death. For the other it meant administration, cabinet councils, all the business of government. For both of them it meant that their whole lives, their whole thoughts, were devoted to the greatest revolution in the world, to truth and justice, the noblest things in the world. But, in their intimate moments, they were still "Nicholasha" and "Aliocha," the old-time comrades, with no distinction of rank between them.

"But still, tell me how you really are, Nicolasha," said Popov.

"Well," said the Commander-in-Chief, leaning towards Popov, "I had, and perhaps I still have, an ulcer in the

stomach : the usual symptoms, you know, pains, vomitings tinged with blood, terrible burnings—in short, a disgustingly dirty business. They sent me to the Caucasus. The pains disappeared, and I was able to resume duty. But, six months later, the pains and the vomitings returned, as bad as ever, and I went back to the Caucasus. There, the pains disappeared again, and I could even drink a bottle of wine at a sitting."

He interrupted himself.

" By the way, Aliocha, won't you have some wine ? I've got some there, under my berth ; I've brought you a case of it. Try it ! "

" No," said Popov. He was still sitting in the same way, with his head resting on the palm of his hand; " I never drink in the morning. Go on, tell me . . ."

" I've told you already that I'm perfectly well."

There was a brief silence. Then Gavrilov went on :

" Tell me, Aliocha, do you know why they ordered me to return to Moscow ? "

" I have no idea."

" An order arrived telling me to come to Moscow at once. I hadn't even time to see my wife. I can't make out what it's all about. Everything is going well at the front. On the other hand, there isn't any conference or anything just now —nothing at all. . . ."

" But tell me quite frankly, Nicolasha," asked Popov, " what do you suspect ? Why did you say something about my mounting a guard of honour over your coffin ? What did you mean ? "

The Commander-in-Chief hesitated before he replied.

" I met Potap at Rostov," he said at last very slowly. " He talked to me a good deal about my illness. He was all for an operation . . . assured me that I should be wise to agree to be operated on, and have the ulcer cut out, or sewn up, or

whatever the devil it is they do with ulcers. In any case, he tried very hard to persuade me. Suspiciously hard, it struck me."

The Commander-in-Chief stopped.

"I'm quite well. My whole system protests against an operation. I don't want to be operated on. I know I shall get all right without one. I tell you I haven't any more pain. I'm even putting on weight. . . . The Devil only knows what's wrong! . . . I must be getting old. I've become a Soviet gentleman, so to speak, worrying about my belly all the time like this. It's too bad, isn't it?"

He stopped again and took up the book.

"I've just been reading Tolstoi: old Tolstoi's *Childhood and Youth*. He knew how to write, that old man, didn't he? He knew all about life, and death and blood. . . . . I've seen a good deal of blood in my life, but . . . but . . . I'm afraid of an operation. I always was afraid of it, even as a boy . . . I'd just as soon have my throat cut and be done with it. Yes, old Tolstoi knew all about anything to do with human blood!"

The orderly entered. He stood to attention, and reported that an officer had arrived from Headquarters with an urgent document; that a car sent by Department No. 1 was awaiting the Commander-in-Chief; that more telegrams had come in; and finally that somebody was inquiring about a trunk consigned from the South. He laid a number of newspapers on the table.

The Commander-in-Chief told him to go and get his great-coat. Then he unfolded a newspaper. On the front page, where the most important news of the day was summarised, there was an item in heavy type: "Arrival of Commander-in-Chief Gavrilov." On the third page he read: "Commander-in-Chief Gavrilov will arrive in Moscow to-day.

He has temporarily relinquished command to be operated on for an ulcer in the stomach."

Comrade Gavrilov's state of health, the newspaper went on, gave rise to the utmost anxiety; but the doctors guaranteed that the operation would be a success.

The Commander-in-Chief, the veteran of the Revolution, the hero who had sent millions of men to death, the military genius, the man whose function was that of a machine perfected for producing victory out of blood—Gavrilov flung himself back in his chair. He wiped the sweat off his brow with the back of his hand.

"You see, Aliocha?" he said. "There's really something queer about all this. . . .

"But there's nothing to be done," he went on.

"Hullo, orderly," he shouted; "my coat!"

II

At the corner of two of the main streets of the city, where an endless procession of people, cars and lorries passed by, a house with a columned portico stood behind a wooden palisade.

There was nothing to indicate what the house was. At its gateway, with armorial bearings over it, two helmeted sentries stood rigidly. In front of it people went by, cars sounding their horns, the crowd, human time, the grey day, newspaper-sellers, men with portfolios, women in short skirts, wearing deceptive stockings that made their legs look bare. But behind that gateway, with its armorial bearings, Time stood still.

There was another house at the other end of the city. It, too, was in classical style. It, too, was hidden behind a wooden palisade and had a columned portico. Mythological masks in clever bas-relief decorated its façade. There were

two doors, with fauns grinning over them. Two sentry-boxes stood beside each door, and on stools beside the sentry-boxes sat doorkeepers in aprons and long leather boots. A closed car stood in front of one of the doors—a black car with a red cross, bearing the inscription: "First Aid."

At noon precisely a Rolls-Royce drew up in front of the first house: the house where Time slowed down. A sentry opened the door. The Commander-in-Chief stepped out of the limousine.

In the office at the opposite side of the house the windows were screened half way up. The street went about its business outside. A fire was blazing on the hearth. On the table, covered with a red cloth, stood three telephone instruments: three arteries that enabled the man in the room to command the city and know everything that was happening. On it were also arranged office fittings in massive bronze. In the pen-rack lay a dozen pencils, red and blue. To the wall of the room, behind the table, were affixed a radio set, with two pairs of headphones, and a whole battery of electric bell-pushes, ranging from "Waiting-room bell" to "Military alarm bell."

In front of the table was an armchair. Behind it a man, who held himself very stiffly, was sitting on a wooden chair. The window-blinds were drawn. An electric lamp was lit on the desk under a green shade; and because of the shade one could not see the face of the man who held himself so stiffly.

The Commander-in-Chief's feet sank into the carpet as he crossed over to the armchair. He sat down in it.

The man who sat stiffly opened the conversation.

"Listen, Gavrilov; it is not for us to speak of the Juggernaut of Revolution. It's a great pity, but I suppose that the wheel of history is generally set in motion by the impetus of

death, the impetus of blood, especially when revolution is concerned. It is not for us, I tell you, to speak of death and of blood.

"Do you remember that day when we forced the Red soldiers to follow us, near Ekaterinov? You carried a rifle then, and so did I. A shell had blown your horse to bits and you marched on foot. The Red soldiers started retreating, but you shot one of them with your revolver, lest they should all run away. General, you would have shot me, too, if I had lost courage, and I think you would have been right."

"You're very comfortable here," said the Commander-in-Chief. "One would think you were a Minister. May I smoke? I don't see any cigarette-ends."

"No, you mustn't smoke. It's not good for you. I don't smoke either."

"Well, tell me what you have to say, without beating about the bush," said the Commander-in-Chief. His voice was sharp and stern. "Why did you send for me? You needn't play the diplomat with me. Out with it!"

"I sent for you because you must be operated on. The Revolution has need of you. I have consulated specialists, and they tell me that in less than a month you will be completely restored to health. The Revolution demands it. The specialists are ready for you, and they will examine you and see what has to be done. One of them, as a matter of fact, is a German."

"As you will, old man. By the way, I'm going to smoke whether you like it or not. My own doctors have assured me that there is no need whatever of an operation, and that I can be cured without one. I feel very well, I don't need an operation, and I don't want one."

The man behind the table slid his hand behind him and felt for a bell-push on the wall. A silent secretary appeared.

" Is anybody waiting to see me ? " he asked. The secretary said " Yes." The man said nothing more, and the secretary disappeared again.

" Comrade General," the man went on ; " you remember how we discussed the problem whether we should or should not send four thousand men to what seemed to us certain death ? You demanded that we should send them, and you were quite right. So there you are ! In three weeks, I repeat, you will be completely cured. You must excuse me, but I have already given the necessary orders."

A telephone bell rang. He unhooked the receiver and put it to his ear, queried and spoke. Then he turned back to his visitor.

" Excuse me, Comrade Gavrilov. There is nothing more to be said."

The Commander-in-Chief finished his cigarette. He crushed out the end of it into the pen-rack full of red and blue pencils, and rose from his chair.

" Good-bye," he said.

" See you later," replied the other.

The Commander-in-Chief passed over the red carpet to the door. The Rolls-Royce bore him away into the noise of the streets.

The man with the stiff back stayed in his office. Nobody else, as a matter of fact, came to see him.

Stiffly as ever, he bent over some documents. He picked up a red pencil. Then he rang, the secretary appeared, and he gave the order : " Have that cigarette-end thrown out—that one in the pen-rack there ! " He went on working in silence, bending over documents with his red pencil in his hand. An hour went by, and then another. The man still bent over his documents, working.

A servant came in without making a sound, laid a tray

with a glass of tea and a slice of cold meat covered with a napkin on a small table near the window, and went out. The man with the stiff back rang the bell for his secretary again.

"Is it ready—the secret report? All right; bring it in!"

Once more, for a long time, the man bent in silence over a document. It contained reports from the Commissariat of Finance, the Ogpu, the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, and the Commissariat of Labour. Then into his room, one after the other, came the two men who, with himself, made up that "*troika*" which governed the whole country.

At four o'clock in the afternoon several cars stopped outside the second house, which stood in the suburbs.

The house shrank back into the shadows, as though they could take the chill off the humidity in which the whole city was steeped. At the side door two armed policemen had joined the doorkeepers with their aprons and their long leather boots. At the main door two other armed policemen mounted guard. An officer, supple as a willow, wearing the double insignia of the Red Flag, sprang up the steps into the house, followed by two Red soldiers.

The room was large and sparsely furnished. In the middle stood a table covered with white oilcloth. It was surrounded by chairs upholstered in imitation leather with high backs, like those in railway stations. Along one of the walls was a couch, also in imitation leather, covered with a sheet.

The first cars brought specialists, surgeons and doctors. They came in and greeted one another. A tall man, bearded and hairy, with an easy-going manner, received them. He seemed to be the master of the house. Professor Losovsky, a man of about thirty-five, clean-shaven, with eyes deeply sunk in their sockets, hastened forward to him.

The clean-shaven man handed the bearded man an envelope, with wax seals, which had been slit open. The bearded man pulled a sheet of paper out of it, adjusted his glasses, read the paper, adjusted his glasses again, and handed the paper to another doctor. He seemed rather upset.

"As you see," said the clean-shaven man, in a solemn tone, "it is a secret document, practically an order. It was delivered to me this morning. You understand?"

Snatches of conversation were to be heard, in hushed, startled voices.

"But why have a consultation?"

"I was summoned by special order. The telegram was addressed to the head of the University.

"Yes, yes . . . of course . . . . the Revolution . . . the Commander-in-Chief . . . this order . . . yes, but still . . ."

"A consultation? Well, obviously! . . ."

The electric light was switched on. It cast clear, cutting shadows.

One of the doctors buttonholed another. A third took the arm of a fourth and walked him a few steps away.

Suddenly the butts of the Red soldiers' rifles rang on the threshold. Heels clicked together. The Red soldiers stiffened into immobility. Tall and lithe as a willow, the young officer with the insignia of the Red Flag appeared in the doorway. He sprang to attention like a whipcrack.

A second later, the Commander-in-Chief strode rapidly into the room. He flung back his hair and eased the collar of his tunic.

"Greeting, comrades!" he said. "Do you want me to undress?"

The doctors sat down slowly on the imitation leather chairs. They put their elbows on the table or laid their hands on it, adjusted spectacles and pince-nez. They begged the patient

to sit down too. The one who had handed over the sealed envelope, the one whose eyes were sunk in their sockets behind his pince-nez, addressed the man with the beard.

" Pavel Ivanovitch, I think that, as *primus inter pares*, you will agree to preside over our consultation ? "

" Am I to undress ? " repeated the Commander-in-Chief ; and he fumbled with the collar of his tunic again.

Pavel Ivanovitch, the man who had been asked to preside over the consultation, pretended not to hear the question. He took his seat at the head of the table.

" I think," he said, " that we ought to begin by asking the patient when the pains first manifested themselves, and what were the pathological symptoms which showed him that he was ill. Then we can proceed to examine him."

The consultation produced a sheet of paper, covered with the illegible writing of one specialist, and endorsed by six others as well.

" Minutes of the consultation attended by Professor . . . Professor . . . Professor . . . (and so on seven times over).

" The patient, Citizen Nicholas Ivanovitch Gavrilov, complains of pains in the pit of the stomach, vomitings and burnings. He has been suffering for the past two years, but does not recall when he first noticed the malady. He has been treated continuously in field ambulances and has taken the cure at watering-places—without result. At the personal request of the patient, the doctors here present were called into consultation.

" *Status praesens :* The general condition of the patient is satisfactory. Lungs normal. Slight hypertrophy of the heart, with accelerated pulse. Some symptoms of neurasthenia. Apart from the stomach, nothing pathological in the other organs. An *ulcus ventriculi* is to be presumed, which requires operation.

" The consultants requested Professor Anatole Kousmitch Losovsky to operate on the patient. Professor Pavel Ivanovitch Kokossov agreed to assist at the operation.

(After the operation, it came out, in the course of private conversation, that, strictly speaking, not one of the seven doctors present had thought it necessary to operate on Gavrilov. His case came within the category of those which do not require surgical intervention. But at the consultation scarcely a word was said about this. The taciturn German did, indeed, make some remark about an operation being unnecessary ; but, after some discussion with his colleagues, he did not press his objection.

It was also said that after the consultation, just as he was getting into his car, Professor Kokossov, the one whose hair fell over his eyes, remarked to Professor Losovsky : " Well, you know, if it were my brother who had our patient's malady, I shouldn't operate—certainly not ! " To which Professor Losovsky replied : " Perhaps not ; but bear in mind that this operation is absolutely safe." Then the car spluttered and started.)

The man with the stiff back was still sitting in his room in the first house. The window-curtains were closely drawn. The replenished fire was burning on the hearth. The house stiffened into silence, as though silence had weighed upon it for a whole century.

The man was still sitting in his wooden chair ; but now he had thick German and English books spread over the table in front of him. In a firm hand he was writing in Russian on German " *Lainen-Poste* " paper. The books assembled in front of him dealt with the State, Law, and Power. The light in his room fell from the ceiling, and now one could see the man's face : a commonplace face, a little

hard, perhaps. It was tense, but not at all tired. He stayed sitting there for a long time, bent over the books and the notes he was making.

Then he rang the bell, and a secretary came into the room. He started dictating. The leading points of his speech were the Soviet Union, America, England, the world, the pound sterling, the output of Russian wheat, American heavy industry, and Chinese labour. The man spoke in a strong, decided voice. Every one of his sentences was a formula.

The moon described its curve above the city.

Meanwhile the Commander-in-Chief was with Popov, in a room in a big hotel inhabited exclusively by Communists. There were three of them. Gavrilov sat at the table, and little Natacha played round his feet.

Gavrilov struck matches for her, and Natacha, full of wonder, as children are in the presence of all the marvels in the world, rounded her lips and blew out the flame. She could not blow very hard, and the match did not go out at once; but in the end it died. And then there was so much astonishment in Natacha's blue eyes, so much enthusiasm, so much reverence in the presence of mystery, that there was nothing to do but strike another match—nothing to do but bow down before that sense of the mysterious which Natacha carried within her.

Then Gavrilov put her to bed. He sat down beside her little cot, and said to the child: "Shut your eyes now, and I'll sing a song for you." Thereupon he began to sing, though he did not know any songs at all. He made one up as he went along.

"The goat has come,
"And the goat says:
"Go to sleep, you . . . sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep."

He smiled, and looked with a roguish eye first at Natacha,

then at Popov. He repeated the thing that had just come into his head.

" The goat has come,
" And the goat says :
" Sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep."

Natacha opened her eyes and smiled, and Gavrilov went on singing the last words in a shy voice. He did not feel at his ease until Natacha went to sleep. Then he and Popov took tea together. They sat close to one another, talking in low voices, slowly, in no hurry, and drinking huge quantities of tea. Gavrilov unfastened the collar of his tunic. He drank his tea out of his saucer, like a true Muscovite. They talked about trifles of all kinds, and then Popov laid his cup, still half full, aside.

" Nicolasha," he said, after a short pause ; " I must tell you that Zina has just deserted me. She has left the child with me and gone off with an engineer. She has been in love with him for some time—or the Devil only knows whether she is or not. I have no desire to judge her, and I don't want to soil myself by swearing at her ; but I'm bound to say that she slunk off like a bitch, secretly, without saying a word to me. It makes me feel ashamed myself. I picked her out of the trenches at the front, as you know, and I took such care of her, I loved her, fool that I was, and I petted her, and I did everything . . . everything for her ; but, after all, I didn't understand her—this woman with whom I've lived for five years."

And Popov went on to tell all about the details of their parting : squabbles of the kind that are so painful just because they are so petty, just because one can see nothing really big behind them. Then they started talking about children ; and Gavrilov spoke of his own family life, his three sons, and his wife, who, elderly though she was, still remained his only love.

" Lend me a book to read," said the Commander-in-Chief before he left ; " something quite simple, you know, about ordinary people who are really good and really in love—a book like Tolstoi's *Childhood and Youth.*

In Popov's room every corner was stuffed with books ; but it was impossible for him to find a simple book, a book just about human love and human life, about ordinary people with ordinary feelings, about the sun and the simple joys of day-to-day existence. No, Popov had no book of that kind. . . .

" Tut, tut ! " said Gavrilov playfully ; " so that's the best revolutionary literature can do, is it ? Well, in that case, I'll just read Tolstoi once more. Ah, but he's got some fine pages about old discarded ball-room gloves ! . . ."

His face fell, and he stopped.

" Listen, Aliocha," he said, after a moment, in a very low voice ; " I wasn't going to mention it, because it's hardly worth talking about, but look here. . . . I went to see our chief to-day, and then I went to the hospital. The doctors were waiting for me. They gave their minds to it—too much so, I'd say ! I tell you again that I don't want to be operated on. Of course I'm against it, but to-morrow—I'm going to sacrifice myself, all the same. So you'll come and see me at the hospital, won't you, and not forget your old friend ? You needn't write to my wife and children. Good-bye, old man ! "

Gavrilov left the room without shaking hands with Popov. A car was waiting outside the hotel. Gavrilov got into it and snapped : " To the station ! "

The Commander-in-Chief went into his sleeping quarters, took off his boots, put on slippers, and rang for tea. Then he went into the saloon and sat down at the table. The steward brought tea, but the Commander-in-Chief did not touch it.

He spent some time bent over his book. It was *Childhood and Youth*.

He read. He meditated. Then he returned to his sleeping quarters, brought back a big, loose-leaved notebook, rang the bell, told the orderly : " Ink, please ! " and started writing slowly, thinking over every sentence.

He wrote one letter, read it over, reflected for a moment, and sealed the envelope. He wrote a second letter, reflected, and sealed the envelope. He wrote a third letter, a very short letter. He wrote it hastily, and he sealed it without reading it over.

In the coach silence reigned supreme. The sentry stood stiff beside the steps. The orderly and the steward stood stiff in the corridor. It seemed as though Time itself stiffened.

The letters in their white envelopes lay a while on the table, in front of the Commander-in-Chief. Finally he took a big envelope, put the three letters inside it, and wrote on the outside : " To be opened after my death."

III

The first snow fell on the day of Gavrilov's death. The city swooned, sunk in a white silence : very white, very peaceful ; and the trees outside the windows were covered with little tomtits that had come from the steppes with the snow.

Professor Pavel Ivanovitch Kokossov used to wake as a rule at seven o'clock in the morning. It was precisely at that hour that he woke the day of the operation.

The doctor put his head outside the bedclothes, cleared his throat, stretched out his hairy arm to the night-table, groped as usual for his glasses, planted them on his nose, and they were swallowed up under his hair. Outside the window, a tomtit perched on a birch tree scattered the snow

all round it. The professor struggled into his dressing-gown, thrust his feet into slippers, and went into the bathroom.

When he emerged from it, snuffling and muttering, his wife, Katherina Pavlovna, was breaking up the sugar in the professor's glass with a spoon. The samovar, too, asserted itself in the dining-room.

The professor kissed his wife's hand, sat down opposite her, and settled his glasses under his hair. He swallowed a mouthful of tea, and was obviously preparing to make some trite remark when the traditional rites of breakfast were interrupted by an unexpected telephone call.

He looked severely at the door leading into his study, where the telephone bell was ringing; threw a questioning glance at his plump wife, wrapped in a Japanese kimono, not so young now; got up, and, with his eyes still asking questions, went over to the telephone. Immediately afterwards words pronounced in a staccato, unpleasant voice started flowing into the instrument.

"Hullo . . . hullo . . . yes, yes . . . speaking. Who's there, and what do you want? And . . . what? . . . what? . . ."

The instrument announced that Headquarters was speaking, and that it was understood the operation was fixed for half-past eight. Headquarters wanted to know whether the professor required anything. Would the professor like them to send a car for him?

The professor lost his temper. He started talking into the receiver in a high-pitched voice.

"Listen to me. I serve society, not private individuals . . . I always take the tram . . . yes, I always take the tram to go to hospital. I do my duty as my conscience bids me—do you hear what I'm saying? And I see no reason why I should not take the tram to-day, the same as any other day."

He slammed the receiver. Then he sniffed, coughed, and

went back to his wife and his tea. He sniffed a bit more, gnawed his moustache, and calmed down rapidly. His eyes behind their glasses appeared again from under his hair. They looked even keener and brighter than usual.

" It's all the same to me," he said. " They say : ' Operate,' and I operate. If they don't want me to operate, I don't. It's all the same to me."

He stopped.

" I'm assisting to-day at an operation at my own hospital. We're operating on a Bolshevik, Commander-in-Chief Gavrilov."

" Isn't that the man . . . ." said Katherina Pavlovna, " the man about whom the Bolshevist papers are always talking ? A terrible man, it seems. But tell me, Pavel Ivanovitch, why aren't you operating yourself ? "

" Eh ? . . . well . . . there's nothing surprising about that," said the professor. " Nowadays, you know, it's the young men's day, and Losovsky is operating. The funny thing is that after all our consultations and everything, though all our great celebrities have made auscultations, and taken specimens, and X-ray photographs, and all the rest of it . . . we still don't quite know where we are. But the main point is that I don't know the man . . . It's just a matter of a formula—not of a man, not of a living person. It's just General So-and-so, whom they're always talking about in the newspapers to frighten the bourgeoisie . . . But if the operation isn't a success—my word, you'll hear about it ! . . ."

Professor Anatole Kousmitch Losovsky's flat was nothing at all like that of the Kokossovs. While the Kokossovs' preserved, and indeed personified, the dominant taste of the 'eighties of the past century, Losovsky's had been designed and furnished during the years between 1907 and 1916. It had heavy curtains, a big divan, naked women in bronze

acting as lamp-holders on the oak desk; the walls were hung with tapestry, and the tapestry was hung in turn with second-rate pictures.

Losovsky was lying on the divan; not alone, but with a pretty girl. His evening-dress shirt was flung on the floor. Losovsky awakened, sprang out of bed at a bound, and pulled back the curtain. The heavy stuff slid to the side of the window, and the light of a snowy day penetrated into the room. With an air of happiness, proper to people who are passionately fond of life, Losovsky looked out at the street, the snow, and the sky.

The telephone bell rang. In this room the instrument stood beside the couch, behind the tapestry. Losovsky unhooked the receiver. "Yes, yes, speaking. . . ." They were calling from Headquarters, and wanted to know whether they should send a car for the professor.

"Oh, yes, please do! And don't worry about the operation. It will go off all right, I'm sure. About the car—yes; please send me one, more especially as I have some calls to make before the operation."

Very early in the morning, Popov went to see Gavrilov. It was barely dawn, indeed, for the street lamps were still lit. Even so, Popov had not much chance of talking to his friend. The nurse hurried him off to the bathroom to make his last toilet before the operation.

"Aliocha," Gavrilov had barely time to say before he went; "read what Tolstoi has to say in *Childhood and Youth*, about 'what is done' and 'what is not done.' Ah, how well he knew us, that old man!"

They were the last words that Popov heard Gavrilov speak before he died.

On the eve of the operation they had introduced a rubber tube into the patient's digestive tract; a siphon-like affair

with which they pumped out the contents of the stomach. It was a hideous apparatus, which made one feel sick and conveyed the impression that it had been specially invented to humiliate human dignity.

Gavrilov went to the operating theatre wearing a long hospital shirt, slacks of thick stuff, and a pair of numbered slippers on his bare feet. He entered it pale, haggard and weary.

In the next room spirit lamps were burning, tall nickel jars were bubbling, and people in white overalls were working in silence. The operating theatre was a very large room. It was extremely well lighted, for one of its walls consisted entirely of glass, through which one could see across the river. In the middle of the room was a long table—the operating table.

Kokossov and Losovsky came forward to meet Gavrilov. Both were wearing white overalls, and with their white caps on their heads they looked like cooks. Kokossov, moreover, had his beard covered with a bib, and nothing seemed to be visible of him but his eyes, lost in his hair. Along the wall a dozen men in white overalls were drawn up.

Gavrilov, escorted by a nurse, entered the room quite calmly. He bowed in silence to the professors and walked towards the table. As he went he looked out of the window, and clasped his hands behind his back. The theatre sister appeared, carrying by a hook a boiling steriliser in which instruments clinked together.

"We'll make a start, Comrade Gavrilov," said Losovsky. "Would you get on the table? Take off your slippers and shirt, please."

Gavrilov looked at the sister, and took off his shirt with a slightly embarrassed air. She looked back at him as one

looks at any inanimate thing. She smiled at him as one smiles at a child.

Gavrilov sat down on the table, took off first one shoe and then the other, lay down quickly, adjusted the head-rest, and closed his eyes. Then, with a swift, skilful movement that came from long practice, the sister pulled the straps over his feet and fastened the man to the table. The anæsthetist placed a napkin over the patient's eyes, smeared his nose and mouth with vaseline, put the mask over his face, and took Gavrilov's wrist to feel his pulse. He poured chloroform on the mask, and a sweet, sickly odour spread through the room.

The anæsthetist noted the time of the beginning of the operation. The doctors walked over to the window in silence. Meanwhile the nurse arranged bistouries, napkins, pincers, clips, absorbents, needles and silk thread on sterilized gauze. A mortal silence reigned in the room. All at once the patient moved his head and groaned.

" I'm suffocating," he said ; " take off the mask ! " and his teeth chattered.

" Just a minute, please," answered the anæsthetist.

A few minutes later the patient started talking and singing.

" The frost has gone . . . The Volga is breaking up . . . My dear, my dear . . . I love you . . . how I love you ! . . ." said the Commander-in-Chief ; and then he whispered : " Sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep."

" But don't ever give me cranberry marmalade ! I've had enough of it, and, besides, it's not the thing to do."

He stopped. Then he cried aloud in a harsh voice—doubtless that voice which resounded on the battlefield.

" Don't give way ! Not a step further, or I'll shoot you all ! . . . Aliocha, my little brother . . . It's full speed now. I can't see the earth any more . . . I remember everything.

Oh, yes, I know what the Revolution means; I know the force that it represents. And I'm not afraid to die—ah, no."

And he started singing again: "A carpenter lives in the Urals, a carpenter, a carpenter. . . ."

"How do you feel? Aren't you asleep?" the anæsthetist asked Gavrilov, in a very low tone.

Gavrilov answered in his ordinary voice, but in a low tone too, like a conspirator.

"Not very well. I'm suffocating!"

"Just a little longer," said the anæsthetist, and he gave him more chloroform.

Kokossov looked at his watch with an anxious air, bent over the patient's chart, and read it again. They had been anæsthetising Gavrilov for twenty-seven minutes. Kokossov summoned an assistant, and stuck out his face for him to adjust the glasses on his nose.

Gavrilov was definitely anæsthetised after forty-eight minutes. Then the doctors washed their hands for the last time in surgical alcohol. The nurse uncovered Gavrilov's stomach, and they saw lean hips, a hollow abdomen. With sweeping movements Kokossov washed the site of the operation—the pit of the stomach—with alcohol and tincture of iodine. The nurse produced cloths to cover Gavrilov's head and feet, and poured half a bottle of iodine over Losovsky's hands.

Losovsky took a bistoury and passed it over the flesh. Blood gushed forth, and the flesh fell apart. Beneath the skin, fat showed yellow as mutton-fat, in layers, veined with blood-vessels. Once more Losovsky cut the living flesh, sliced through the white, shining fascia, traversed the bluish nerves. Kokossov, using clips and absorbents with speed and skill such as his awkward appearance did not lead one to expect, promptly stanched the bleeding vessels.

Arming himself with another bistoury, Losovsky opened the peritoneum. Then he laid the bistoury aside and wiped away the blood with sterilised napkins. Through the incision were to be seen the intestine and the milky blue pouch of the stomach. Losovsky inserted his hand into the intestine, turned the stomach over, and squeezed it gently.

On the shining surface of the organ, just at the place where the ulcer should have been, there was a white scar, as though moulded in wax, rather like the larva of a cockchafer. The scar showed that the ulcer was already absorbed and that the operation was quite unnecessary.

But suddenly, just at the moment when Gavrilov's stomach was held in Losovsky's hand, a cry rent the silence.

"His pulse! his pulse!" cried the anæsthetist.

"Respiration!" added Kokossov, almost automatically.

Then Kokossov's eyes, those horribly intelligent eyes of his, were to be seen emerging from beneath his hair and shifting from side to side behind his glasses.

As for Losovsky's eyes, fixed close to his nose in their sockets, they retreated still more. They withdrew into his skull. They met and merged, as it were, into one eye, which glared terribly.

The patient had no pulse. His heart had stopped beating, he was not breathing, and his feet were already getting cold.

It was a cardiac shock. His system had refused the chloroform and been intoxicated by it.

It was clear that Gavrilov would never wake again. He was bound to die. With all the aid of artificial respiration, oxygen, camphor, physiological solution or anything else, death could be retarded only by an hour, by twelve hours, perhaps by thirty hours, but no longer. Properly speaking the man was already dead. There was no means of restoring him to consciousness. It was evident that Gavrilov was

meant to die under the knife on an operating table.

Doctor Kokossov turned towards the sister and thrust his face towards her for her to settle his glasses on his nose again.

" Open the window ! " he cried. " Camphor ! Get the physiological solution ready ! "

The silent audience of doctors suddenly became more silent than ever. As though nothing had happened, Kokossov bent over the instruments on the little table. He said nothing. Losovsky bent over too, very close to him.

" Pavel Ivanovitch . . . ? " whispered Losovsky. His tone was querulous.

" Well, what is it ? " replied Kokossov, out loud.

" Pavel Ivanovitch . . . ? " Losovsky repeated, lower still. His tone was no longer querulous.

The two doctors straightened themselves and looked at each other. The two eyes of the one of them seemed to fuse into a single eye. The eyes of the other of them emerged from under his hair.

As though he were afraid of a blow, Losovsky drew away from Kokossov for a moment. His single eye became double again : became two eyes, which were shifty. A second later, they met again in a gaze more direct than ever : a piercing stare.

" Pavel Ivanovitch . . ." Losovsky muttered.

His hands fluttered over the incision. He did not sew up the severed flesh, but merely brought it together after a fashion, taking no particular care ; then he drew the skin together and started sewing the superficial layer.

" Loosen the arms ! " he ordered suddenly. " Artificial respiration ! "

They opened the enormous window of the operating theatre. The freshness of the first snow stole into the room.

Camphor was already being injected into the patient's body. Kokossov, helped by the anæsthetist, pulled Gavrilov's arms backwards and forwards again, forcing him to breathe artificially. Losovsky went on sewing up the incision.

"The physiological solution!" he cried a moment later.

The sister plunged two needles, almost as thick as cigarettes, into the patient's chest, and injected a thousand millimetres of saline solution into his blood to maintain the arterial tension. Gavrilov's face was a ghastly blue and his lips were livid.

Finally they lifted him from the operating table and put him on a wheeled table to take him to his room. His heart was beating, and he was breathing; but he did not recover consciousness. He never recovered it up to the very last moment. Then his heart, artificially saturated with camphor and salt ceased to beat.

He died, fourteen hours later, after the doctors had done all they could for him. Or it may be that he died because, apart from the two surgeons and the sister, nobody had access to his room until he breathed his last.

An hour before the death of the Commander-in-Chief was officially announced, a patient next door heard strange noises coming from Gavrilov's room. It sounded as though somebody was knocking on the wall, as prisoners do in jail. There, in that room, was dying a man who, officially, died suddenly after the operation; for medicine always holds by the consecrated tradition, according to which it is not to be admitted that a man may die under the surgeon's knife.

Now Gavrilov was dead. Doctor Losovsky, with a white sheet of paper in his hand, came out of his room and, with bowed head, announced in a sad, solemn tone that, to the great regret of all of them, the patient, the Commander-in-

Chief, Citizen Nicholas Ivanovitch Gavrilov, had died at 1.17 in the morning.

Three-quarters of an hour later, at about two o'clock in the morning, companies of Red soldiers entered the courtyard of the hospital. All the entrances, as well as all the staircases, were at once put under guard.

At that hour, clouds were creeping across the sky, and the full moon seemed tired of chasing them away.

At that hour, Professor Losovsky, in a closed Rolls-Royce, crossed the courtyard of Department No. 1. The Rolls glided noiselessly through the gateway with the armorial bearings, was passed by the sentries, and stopped at the always deserted flight of steps. A sentry opened the door. Losovsky went into the office with the red tablecloth.

Nobody knows anything about the conversation which took place in the office. It lasted only three minutes. Losovsky came out very hurriedly, with his coat on his arm and his hat in his hand, like a hero of Hoffman's. He did not find the car at his disposal any longer. In the moonlight, the still, deserted streets seemed to sway around Losovsky as he stumbled away.

When Losovsky—like a hero of Hoffman's—had left the office in Department No. 1, the man with the stiff back remained alone. He stood behind the desk, leaning forward heavily, supporting himself on his hands. He stayed motionless for a long time. He had been wrenched away from his documents and his formulæ.

Suddenly he made a move. His movements were always as rigid, as awkward, as those formulæ which he dictated to his secretary every night; but this time he moved more quickly than usual. He pressed a bell-push behind him, and unhooked a receiver. "A closed car!" he said to the orderly on duty. Then, over the telephone, he spoke to somebody

who had evidently been asleep: the head of the "*troika.*" His voice was faint.

"Andrew, my dear friend, still another one has just left us . . . Nicholas Gavrilov is dead. We have lost our fighting comrade. Would you telephone to Potap, old man?"

"To the hospital!" the man with the stiff back told the chauffeur.

In the dark corridors, dark sentries mounted guard. The house kept silence, as silence must be kept where death reigns imperiously. The man with the stiff back passed through dark corridors to Commander-in-Chief Gavrilov's room. He went into that room where the body of the Commander-in-Chief lay on the bed. There was a terrible smell of camphor.

Everybody else went out of the room. The man with the stiff back and the body of Gavrilov were alone together. The man sat down on the bed, at the feet of the corpse. Gavrilov's hands lay outside the bedclothes, alongside his body. Bowed, motionless, the man stayed for a long time beside him. Silence reigned. The man took Gavrilov's hand and shook it.

"Good-bye, comrade!" he said; "Good-bye, brother!"

And he went out, with his head still bowed. He did not look at anybody.

"You ought to open the windows," he said; "the atmosphere is unbearable."

IV

That night, after the funeral of Commander-in-Chief Gavrilov; when the military trumpets had ceased to blow, when the draped flags had ceased to dip to the coffin, when thousands upon thousands of men had passed by his grave with a stricken air, and when the Commander-in-Chief's body was already beginning to freeze in the frozen ground, Popov fell asleep in his hotel room.

He awakened, at what time he did not know, still at his table. It was dark, and Natacha was crying softly. Popov bent over the child, took her up in his arms, and walked her up and down the room.

The white moon, tired with her long journey, peered into the room. Popov went over to the window, looked at the snow outside, and stared into the silence of the night. Natacha slipped out of his arms and stood at the window-sill.

In his pocket, Popov had Gavrilov's letter: the last the Commander-in-Chief had written the night before the operation.

"Aliocha, my brother," it read; "I knew all the time that I was going to die. Forgive me; but let me tell you that you are no longer very young. When I nursed your little girl, an idea struck me, all at once. My wife, too, is no longer young, and you have known her nearly twenty years. I have written to her. You write to her, too. Come together, the two of you, and get married, and bring up the children. Forgive me, Aliocha."

As Natacha stood at the window-sill, Popov saw her puffing out her cheeks, rounding her lips, looking at the moon, staring at it, blowing at it.

"What are you doing, Natacha?" asked her father.

"I want to blow out the moon," replied Natacha.

The full moon, with her face of a stalwart Muscovite market-woman, sat enthroned behind the clouds, tired after all her haste. It was the hour when the dreary machine of the city came to life again. The factory syrens shrilled piercingly. They kept on whistling, slowly—one, two, then three, any number of them. They made up a plaintive crying across the city. Surely it was the soul of the frozen city that wailed through these syrens under the moon?

ANN NAPIER

Every Wednesday

She had waited forty minutes before she became really anxious.

And even then she thought, "It's silly of me. No use getting worried, he'll be on the next bus. Sometimes there are four minutes between them—sometimes seven: never regular. No use getting worried."

And she had stood in the archway, the raindrops falling from her black umbrella, trickling across the drawn cotton and falling with little endless splashes into the puddles at her feet. It was a generous umbrella and it protected her hat very gallantly—those folds of blue silk, perched precariously on her greying hair. Over her best silk dress her long waterproof fell to within four inches of the pavement.

And she waited.

Her head was turned towards Fulham and the black slippery roadway, where the scarlet buses sailed like ships at sea. They all passed her: motor cars, sleek like cat-animals: little carts drawn by tiny rough ponies, where the men's legs, as they sat sideways pulling on the reins, almost dragged along the ground: and her eyes staring at the buses as they came from the distance and went again into the distance, huge, impersonal and scarlet.

It was nearly four now. It was going to happen again: just like it had happened last week.

She felt that old dull feeling of disappointment inside her. She could only wait: and that would be useless: quite useless now.

Through the rain, somewhere beyond the shining roofs, a clock struck four. She moved her feet on the wet stones and sighed. There seemed nothing to do.

Wednesday after Wednesday, month after month, for so many years that she could scarcely remember the beginning, she had met Alfred Carter in the afternoon; met him in this particular archway, it might be a few minutes before three or perhaps a few minutes after three.

"Well, Sarah," he would say.

And, "Well, Alfred," she would answer.

And then, as they walked together down the road, passing the little shops; cakes, clothes and newspapers huddled next to each other—facing the traffic that rushed onwards towards the larger shops in the wider streets, he might say, as he paused by a placard:

"There's Lloyd George—talking again," and, "These Welsh . . ."

And she would say, "Yes, Alfred," and watch him shake his head, as if things were indeed getting beyond him.

They never spoke much; just walked side by side down the road and at the corner where the vast new Picture House reared itself beneath hoardings stuck with incredible posters, Alfred would say:

"Shall we go in?"

And she would nod.

Every Wednesday—until last week. All the afternoon she had waited and he had never come. Never come: nor had he sent any message: just nothing.

And now—the same thing again.

All the other days Sarah Simmonds lived in Kensington, where she was a cook-general in a flat.

And all the other days Alfred Carter lived in Putney, with Ada, his wife.

But on Wednesday afternoon they went out together, and Ada Carter knew nothing at all about Sarah because Alfred and Sarah had decided that it should be like that.

It was more than twenty years ago that he had met Sarah. She had been walking across Wimbledon Common with a friend and gone to have a late tea in a house down the hill. Alfred Carter had been in the room when she came to the doorway.

The wind from the Common had ruffled her fair hair, so that it curled in tendrils around her face and escaped from beneath the big straw hat, squashed to her head by its mass of heavy pink roses.

Alfred Carter had stared.

" Pretty : that's what she is : pretty as a picture."

But he said nothing aloud.

Only years afterwards, when the Wednesdays had changed from a casual suggestion to the ordered routine of their life, and her hair was streaked with white and she was no longer gay, he still saw her as she had stood that afternoon in the doorway.

" Pretty : that's what she is."

She knew from the beginning that he was married : and had accepted it. Sometimes he had held her hand. Once beneath a lilac tree, with the moon tilted in the twilight night, he had kissed her. Never any more : only as the years passed and faded them both, Wednesday afternoon had never grown less important.

But there was nothing for Ada Carter to know.

And as she stood in the December afternoon, Sarah thought of all those years and saw innumerable Alfreds come towards her: young Alfreds, with round faces and laughing mouths; Alfreds with greying hair; Alfreds silent and Alfreds older and more disappointed but always with eyes that lit up at sight of her. And she never wondered whether this was love, or whether this thing had been too dearly bought: she only knew that she was waiting for Alfred and that he never came.

The rain stopped. She closed her umbrella. Perhaps if she went to Putney the house might tell her something. Ada she could never ask. How could she ring the bell and inquire, a complete stranger to his wife, for Mr. Carter? But she might learn something from the windows.

She crossed the road and climbed on to a bus.

The sun was already setting as she crossed Putney Bridge. On either side of the great path of water lights flickered uncertainly.

She shook herself slightly as she clambered off the bus and stood on the pavement.

The roads were still wet from the rain: great pools of water lay in the shadow, and the lights from the windows shone yellow. The roadway seemed as black and fluid as the river.

She turned towards the lemon in the western sky and walked quickly up the hill.

She chose the roads carefully, stopping sometimes to read the names in the gathering twilight, until suddenly she found the house.

There it was: a little away from the road, demurely fenced with railings. No blinds drawn but in the upstairs window a pale light burning.

She stood across the road and gazed up.

What was there she could do?

Last Wednesday had been bad enough but this—and next week, what would happen then? She was dismayed.

A wind blew cold down the street and she shivered. She was alone, knowing only Alfred: no one else—except one of Alfred's friends, Tom Baker from Finsbury, too far away. She could ask Tom; but days would be wasted.

Suddenly she had made her decision. Quickly she turned and walked back as fast as she could to the High Street, where the shops were lit for the night.

Between a shoemaker's and a confectioner's, the doors of a grocer's shop stood open. Without any hesitation she went up to the counter.

"I want a half bottle of whiskey," she said.

Her own voice sounded determined; she waited impatiently and counted the money into the man's hand. Then with the whiskey under one arm and the umbrella carried bravely in the other, she turned and made once more for the house on the hill.

The curtains were drawn across the windows but upstairs the light still showed in a yellow bar.

This time she did not wait across the road: she walked to the gate and with a firm hand lifted the latch, nearly running in her eagerness up the short path, she rang the bell.

With her eyes fixed on the door she waited, almost panting. With the hand that held the umbrella she tried to pat the blue hat to a better angle.

Footsteps sounded, a light showed through the letter-box and the door opened.

A woman stood there, shorter than Sarah, with white in her hair.

Sarah said, "I came from Mr. Carter's friend, Tom Baker,

who lives at Finsbury. I've brought him a present," and she held out the bottle of whiskey.

" Mr. Carter is in bed ; he's very sick indeed," the woman said, " I am Mrs. Carter."

" Pleased to meet you," said Sarah, " I am Sarah Simmonds."

" Will you come inside ? " said Mrs. Carter. " It was very kind of you to come such a way."

She took the whiskey from Sarah.

" I'm worried about Mr. Carter," she said. " Perhaps you'd like to see him ? Would you ? "

Sarah came inside the tiny hall.

" Yes," she said, " I should," and then added, " If I may."

" You might cheer him up," said the other woman, she passed Sarah in the hall and turned on the light over the stairs.

The flowered paper on the walls showed mauve and rose-coloured in the brilliance : festoons of lavender ribbon binding the roses with great bows and knots.

" Nice," thought Sarah.

She put her umbrella in a china jar, hung her waterproof across the banisters and went slowly up the stairs.

On the landing outside the bedroom Mrs. Carter turned with her fingers resting on the white knob of the door.

" We don't know exactly," she said. " The doctor says kidneys. He may have caught a chill. He's very low."

She opened the door.

" Here's someone to see you," she said.

Sarah stood quite still in the doorway : the light from a small reading lamp near the bed slanted across the sheet, but Alfred Carter's face was in shadow. The fire glowing red in the grate seemed to make the room oppressive. It was a sick room : and Alfred was a sick man.

She forced herself to smile, " I've come from Tom Baker : he sent you a present. I'm so sorry you are ill."

The words sounded unreal.

From the shadow his eyes held hers. Mrs. Carter smoothed the eiderdown.

" I asked Miss Simmonds to come up. It's a cold wet evening to come so far."

Her tone reassured him. Sarah saw his eyes waver and his mouth smile. She shook her head. He could never have thought that after so many years she would at this time have told Ada ?

The unreal conversation went on. The two women sat on small chairs drawn close to the bed. Over the mantelpiece a clock ticked into the pauses.

It seemed to be time to go. She stood up, made her farewells quickly and left the shadows where his eyes followed her.

Mrs. Carter came to the hall.

" You did him good," she said. " Will you come again ? "

" I'd like to," answered Sarah, " Next Wednesday," and added, " If I may."

And she put on her waterproof and went out into the December evening.

And so, when the next Wednesday came, she took her bus straight down to Putney : and the next Wednesday and the next.

But Alfred Carter grew worse. Each week Sarah saw him more frail ; each week she wondered whether she would see him again.

She would talk quietly to Mrs. Carter, as they stood in the hall that was hung around with roses and festoons of mauve ribbons.

" He's sinking—I know."

And the next Wednesday when she came to the painted railings, looking at the house, her heart sank, for the blinds were drawn against the afternoon sunlight.

" He's gone," said Mrs. Carter. The women looked at each other and the sinking of their hearts was the same.

" Perhaps I'd better go then," said Sarah, she half turned.

" Don't do that," the other put a hand on her arm. " And next week too," she said. " Come next week."

So Sarah came again to Putney, when the blinds were open, and she had tea with Ada Carter in the front drawing-room. And when she left Sarah said :

" Why don't you come out with me next Wednesday ? I could meet you in the Fulham Road at three o'clock." And she explained where the archway was.

And the weeks passed.

And Sarah and Ada used to meet every Wednesday a few minutes before three, or perhaps a few minutes after three.

" Well, Sarah," one would say.

And, " Well, Ada," the other would reply.

They never spoke much . . . just walked side by side down the road and at the corner, where the vast new Picture House reared itself beneath hoardings stuck with incredible posters, Ada would say :

" Shall we go in ? "

And Sarah would nod.

Every Wednesday. . . .

A. G. MORRIS

Boots in the Study

My boots, good stout country boots, were standing by the fireplace in the study. I was not in the boots, for I had started work, immediately after breakfast, on my letters, and I was still wearing soft, loose slippers with woolly linings.

I was a fool not to put on my boots ; I knew I should have to get into them before attempting my sermon, because woolly slippers create woolly minds.

I know that by bitter experience, but I'm always lazy and I always hope that it will be different next time. It never is. These Bolshie fellows say clothes don't matter, " the man's the gowd for a' that." You know the sort of thing. Well, I don't worry much about raiment, but boots are definitely different. If I walk about in slippers they wiggle and wobble on my feet, they shuffle along the passages and round the room until I feel weak, old, idiotic and spineless. More than that, I feel dirty and unshaven, lacking in self-respect and ready to fall a victim to drugs and drink. I can see myself flopping across the study, with a grey stubbly face and pin-point eyes, to get my hypodermic syringe and dope out of their secret cache. I doubt if this can be done in boots, or even in well laced shoes.

On the particular morning in question I was nearly door-matted by the organist, owing to my slippers. He came in about the new hymn book, and he caught me off my guard, as it were, without boots or spurs. He was an eager, over-

pleasant young man with a horrid accent and an L.R.A.M., which I am told may mean much or little. I gather that *his* meant a little, but he talked as if it were a lot, and he talked a lot about a very little usually, or so I thought, being unmusical. I hate hymns anyway, but the people like them old and sticky ; that I do know. " Rock of Ages," " Abide With Me," very slow and very juicy. It all soothes the aged and makes the wicked weep, until they get outside. I *won't* alter the old hymn book for any spotty organist. I'm the Vicar, not him.

Do you know what he wanted ? He actually wanted us to have " Chants of Glory ! " An abominable new book with tunes by Bach and Handel, and some stuff by Hilst or Hulst, or Vaughan Something-or-Other, Watkins or Wilson ; I don't really know or care, in spite of Snagsby's L.R.A.M. The old people want the old tunes, not the *very* old ones, but the ones about as old as themselves ; Stainer and Monk, and that lot. You know what I mean.

" Vicar," he said, tapping his teeth; " we ought to make a change. ' Chants of Glory ' will rouse the parish."

" They will, indeed," I said.

" That's fine," he said. " I'm glad you agree with me, Vicar. If you are at my back it's half the battle."

" Battle all right," thought I, but there was no fight in me. My feet seemed flaccid, and, as I moved in my chair, the slippers dribbled off my heels, and my whole body felt as if it were clothed in one dirty wrinkled sock, without a suspender, coming well down the imaginary calf of my top. Ugh ! Horrible. It made me think of filthy old chars in frowsty shawls and greasy black skirts.

Through this chaotic nightmare I heard the voice of Snagsby say :

" We'll get the new books, less discount, Vicar, and what

I propose is this. One or two good congregational practices before evensong. . . ."

At this point I tried to stand up, feeling that I could argue more firmly perpendicular, but I tripped over the torn lining in my left-hand monstrosity. My big toe caught in the hole, I suppose, as I was thrusting home my foot, and I was thrown unwillingly into the disgusting arms of Snagsby. I recoiled, as if he were venomous, and flopped sloppily towards the mantelpiece, intending to stand there in a dominant posture, looking down upon the seated organist, who had the sun full on his pimples. I was determined to wither him with scorn and authority, saying something as follows : " My dear young man, you are new and enthusiastic, but I have long years of parochial experience behindme. . . ."

I failed to speak those words. I saw his eyes travel up and down me. They weren't ordinary eyes, like ours ; they slightly protruded out of his head, and they had a glazed surface. Naturally I can assume that you are familiar with the works of the Major Prophets, and you will remember Nebuchadnezzar's image. Not the large gold one, but the one he saw in a nasty dream, with feet of clay. " A stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces." Well, Snagsby's jelly stony eyes brake my feet in pieces. He saw my broad intellectual forehead, my firm chin, my suitable torso and reasonably pressed legs ; then he saw my feet. I saw him see them, I felt it ; I felt my chin recede, my suit go shapeless, my slippers slop and my authority depart.

" About those congregational practices," I said cringingly. " Yes, Vicar ? " " I think it's quite a sound idea, quite sound. Good for fellowship."

" I was sure you would agree with me, Vicar, and as to the new books. . . ."

But I had sufficient strength to compromise, to temporize in spite of lost morale.

" I'm rather busy just now, Snagsby. Sermon, you know ! Must feed my sheep. . . . Come round to tea, Snagsby, and we'll have a long chat about those books."

" Delighted, Vicar. It's most kind of you, most."

He went. And I put on my boots.

Snagsby had tea with me and my wife. He was very affable and he had several copies of " Chants of Glory," which he forced upon our attention, humming snatches of tunes and producing strings of names and unmentionable musical terms.

But afterwards I took him up to the study and sat him in a chair. Then I stood, with my back to the fire and my hands in my pockets, staring down at him with full consciousness of compact authority. I felt firmly laced and shod all over, and I glowed with the sense of close-fitting power, from head to foot. Snagsby was gaily burbling and humming in his chair, turning over the pages of the hymn book. I cut him short and sharp.

" Snagsby," I said ; " we can't have the new book."

" But, Vicar . . . ? "

" No. My mind is made up, it would unsettle the parish. However, as a concession, before evensong on Sunday fortnight you may practise ' Abide With Me ' and ' O God, our Help in Ages Past '."

He was stunned. He tried to look me up and down again, but the image no longer had feet of clay. The lamplight shone on the well-polished black leather.

My slippers were standing empty by the fireplace, but my boots were standing solidly in front of the fire itself : and I, the Vicar, was in the boots.

EARDLEY BESWICK

A *West Country Tale*

CONSIDERABLY more than a century ago, on a fine evening of late summer, a young man was striding blithely down a cliff-track leading to a fishing village. Throughout his way he could, even at this mild season, hear continuously a sound that pleased his ear, the sough of little waves upon the rocks a great depth below. A large fellow with a swart, avid face and a careless swing in his gait, he was singing as he went. He had good excuse for his humour for he was passing from the cottage of his betrothed to the parsonage, and his object was to instruct the parson to publish their banns.

At a turn of the track he stopped to mount a low field-gate, from which eminence he gazed earnestly back. Many times during the past few months had he stood on this gate, for from it he could catch a last glimpse of the cottage he had left, and of a figure that waved a fluttering bonnet. This time he waved so prolonged a reply that at length the bonnet was tossed into the air, a gesture that announced the disappearance of the thrower. To the mind of a more sophisticated sharer of her secrets the gesture might have evoked thoughts of proverbial windmills. Even to Richard Coppel it might have recalled by its abandon the very wantonness of their love-making, though if it had he would have been the

last to reck. Indeed, as he sprang down and resumed his pliant stride he broke into song again, and cheering his way thus, passed shortly through the village to the parsonage. After receiving his message the parson gazed with earnest benevolence into the man's bold eyes. "Always in a death-bed hurry, Dicky Coppel," he complained, "I could wish I heard that fine voice of yours oftener in the choir and less often from the inn."

The other smiled sheepishly. It was a familiar grievance of the parson's, but the next words, though kindly spoken, had a chilling effect on his gaiety. "It is a mating of two undisciplined natures, I greatly fear. The poor lass needs a steadier man than you. God send you bring her to no unhappiness."

"Amen, parson," responded Coppel gravely, and for some unapprehended reason, and probably for the only time in his life, he realised the approach of fear. All the way back, even after he had turned into the familiar village street he felt as if those tired, wise old eyes were on him, and instead of a glamorous song, the prayer repeated itself in his brain. "God send I bring her not to unhappiness." His mood was thus one of unwonted despondency until, suddenly, accident afforded the one thing necessary to restore his natural optimism—the sight of an enemy.

Anthony Pine was younger and smaller, but in some respects a more mature man than Coppel. He came from a village some forty miles down the coast, and having sojourned here only a few years was accustomed to being regarded as a foreigner, which treatment had fostered a certain natural aloofness in him. Fisherman like Coppel, he had mental capacities beyond the requirements of his calling. He was an adept teller of tales, a rustic artist of a type not uncommon in days when print was rare. This talent had originally

ensured him more consideration in the place than would otherwise have been extended to one not native-born and had mitigated for him the terrible insularity of an English village, but of late it had been neglected and his popularity had waned in consequence. Some two years earlier, restlessness had driven him from his native village, but he had scarcely achieved the first forty miles of a projected odyssey ere the smile of a maiden had ensnared him. She was a charming vivid creature with quick deft ways to distinguish her from other women he had met, yet it was her speech that had attracted him more than all else, for her voice held music, and laughter broke through it so that her phrases would end unexpectedly as if with a blackbird's chuckle. This nervous habit, born doubtless of acute self-consciousness, had been so great a delight to him that for all his life he might never forget the sound of it. After a year's encouragement, he had been mortified to be supplanted in her favour by the exuberant Coppel, then first awakening to the passions of manhood. His gloom, with the increasing obviousness of his ill prospects, had grown until he had little joy of his talent for weaving romances. But he was dogged, too dogged, even when he seemed no longer to possess the slightest chance, to resign his fragile hopes. Coppel now surged up to him boisterously. "Ye've lost, Tony man," he bellowed, "I've beat ee. I've just been having a crack with parson, telling un to put the banns up."

The whole man took the blow and his face witnessed to its cruelty. Nevertheless he would not even now admit defeat. "Banns be but one step, Coppel," he retorted, slowly, "Marriage be often a far cry from banns." To his surprise, Coppel turned away and left him without a further word. As he strode off down the street the winner's swagger was forced and his head unduly high, for the second time that

evening his spirit was wrestling with a shadowy fear.

The slow days succeeded one another until the weeks of waiting were nearly done. It had long been the lovers' delight to meet surreptitiously after dark in the lanes, and on a certain serene evening some three weeks later when Coppel took an ostentatious leave of his betrothed at dusk, it was only after her whispered assent to later trysting. This did not prevent him as he swung down the path from stopping to wave his customary adieu from the field-gate, for this little ceremony had become dear to them both. Nor did it deter him from going swinging on to the inn, where a shout of welcome greeted him, for on such occasions there was joy for him at each end of his journey. He enjoyed a popularity and a prominence among the men of the place that were far beyond the measure of his years, owing this not only to his boldness and good humour, but to a precocious aptitude for leadership, to which the wildness of the times had given unwonted scope. For them he was primarily the restorer of prosperity to what they called the " Trade." Drawing on boyhood's experience of nest-hunting along the cliffs, he had devised a successful plan for landing the smugglers' cargoes at a time when this same " Trade " was languishing, being almost extinguished by the vigilance of the posse at the few safe landing places along that rough coast. Fishing was ever a harsh and scanty livelihood, but the " Trade " offered an easy prosperity in return for boldness and cunning, and for the restorer of this opportunity adulation abounded.

Lounging out from the inn door after an hour or two of noisy homage he was surprised by a figure that lurched out of the darkness to accost him with the whispered reminder, " All right for to-night, my buck ? " It recalled to him an engagement with his smuggling companions that the excitements of passion had obliterated from his mind. At first he

strove to disengage himself, defiantly refusing his assistance in the night's adventure, repudiating his pledges. As the conspirator remonstrated with him, others joined them and instinctively they withdrew to a more secluded place. In spite of their persistence and their covert suggestions of cowardice, suggestions withdrawn as soon as challenged, Coppel remained obstinate. They had almost resigned themselves to abandoning their project for the night when a quiet voice had spoken out of the darkness. "Y'are wrong, all of ee," the voice had taunted him, "Dicky Coppel baint afraid of ee nor of the posse for that matter, but un do be mortal afraid of a petticoat scolding, seemingly."

The thwarted ones appeased their anger with a guffaw at the thrust, and their laughter stung him. "No petticoat'll keep me from doing as I want, Tony Pine," he boasted, "I do what I've a mind to with petticoats, I tell ee." The laughter, now in his favour, did more to win him to their purpose than had all their rages. "I'd like," he went on vaingloriously, "to meet the woman as'd stop me, or the man as'd dare me."

"I dare ee, then, Dicky Coppel," said Pine softly, and the issue had been settled by his words.

An hour later Coppel's naked body hung in a leather sling half-submerged in the weedy depths of a small cove. Above him towered five hundred feet of cliff. It was a gasping, fumbling business he was about, his arms groping at full stretch under water, his head so near the surface that the wavelets creeping up to sluice the rocky foot of the cliff, at times swept over him. The rope that held him was duplicated by a lighter one, and from time to time he would straighten and reach up to give this three sharp jerks. This signal, meaning "Haul up," he had to give some twenty times before the night's work would be concluded. With the

light line there went each time to the top of the cliff two of a series of kegs that, strung together and carefully buoyed and anchored, had lain for the past few days beneath the waters of the cove. It was at once a bold and a cunning business and its cleverness never failed to delight its inventor. Indeed, so brisk and happy was he in his work that he troubled little to reflect that, as he industriously splashed and puffed, an angry, heartsore young woman would be stealing back to bed in her mother's cottage after a long impatient wait in the lane below. After all this would be the last time for a season that he would play this particular game, and would they not be married within the week? Moreover the night's earnings promised to be on a scale that would, in his estimation, more than compensate for the small matter of a broken tryst.

He had little fear of being caught. There were, he reckoned, only two possible sources of interruption. That from the sea was easily provided against. At the first hint that the Preventives were at sea in their gig the kegs could be safely deserted, and himself hauled to the top of the cliff, leaving as the sole evidence of his activities a little cork float bobbing among the customary flotsam of the cove. The alternative danger from the cliff's top he was just about to experience for the first time. Suddenly the supporting rope slackened, plunging him unexpectedly below the surface. He swore with a grim zest. Three times the rope slackened, and the third time its loose length came whistling down the overhanging face of the cliff. Coppel trod water while he retied the keg he had been working on. Then he loosed his leathern sling, secured it to one of the submerged points on the mooring line, and serenely settled down to a long stiff swim for the harbour. As he swam he was elated to think that this experience had at last arrived to test at once his superior hardihood and the perfection of his plan. He knew that his

confederates would have scattered immediately his look-outs reported the approach of the posse. He knew too, that at most a single keg would be intercepted for he insisted on the kegs being removed singly to a safe place inland as each pair appeared at the surface. But the thing that rejoiced him most, as he swept with steady strokes out to sea so as to round the rocky headland that lay between him and the harbour, was that this latest feat would set the seal on his reputation for daring and endurance. He reckoned that for years to come this would be talked of in the parlour of the inn. It worried him not at all that, as he snorted and swished along to the distant landing, the face of his betrothed might be almost as salty wet as his own bronzed skin. With every long swinging stroke his pride and confidence increased, the firm pressure of the water against his strong palms soothing him like a benediction.

It was in the twilight of dawn that he glided under the lee of a little groine and waded heavily through the shallow water to the strand. They were waiting for him there in the shadow of a hulk, with clothes, a draught of brandy, and a welcome that sent the blood to his head,

Within a week his betrothed was married to Anthony Pine by special licence.

* * *

On the night of the wedding as she lay in Anthony's arms a strange jangling noise and a clamour were heard in the distance. She listened to it coming nearer and grew cold with fear and shame. She did not dare to speak to her husband though she knew he must be hearing it, too, knew the terrible thought that must already be corroding her image in his mind. Suddenly he thrust her from him and sat up. "Is it true?" he demanded quietly.

"It be Dicky Coppel's doing," she whispered.

"I know, and he will reckon with me one day for it, to be sure. Tell me it baint true and I'll stand by ee. Tell me it baint true!"

For answer she slipped from the bed and went slowly from the room. "Goodbye, Tony," she called to him as he lay there stunned by his misery. "You'm a good man, but I never truly loved ee. Goodbye to ee." Her voice rose at the end of her words in a little hysterical laugh that caused him an infinite pang. She swung open the outer door and the din of beaten pans and ribald singing filled the place hideously. The avengers of an outraged morality, wild with drink and mischief, were almost at the gate as she slipped barefooted and half naked across the grass. By the light of their swung torches they descried her and sent up a wild halloo. Coppel was at once the first in a pursuit which swept headlong out across the sweet short turf that mantled the edges of the cliff. What were his thoughts and what his intentions at that moment it is impossible to tell. He had been drinking heavily all day, but even in his besotted brain some idea of rescue, of protection from the ignominy of this infernal chase, may have been forming itself. He had almost seized her when he tripped and fell heavily within a few feet of a sheer drop to the black sea below. When the others reached him she had disappeared. The villagers saw her no more though they searched for her both by land and sea.

Within a week Coppel also disappeared. The first of the autumn gales had by then arrived to render further search by sea perilous, but undeterred he had stayed out in his boat one wild night long after other boats had sought the protection of the little harbour, and he, too, had made no return.

Pine left the district shortly after, either unable to endure the company of those whose practice of a vile, but ancient custom had destroyed his life's happiness, or tormented by

uncertainty as to the fate of the man whose evil talk had set them on.

* * *

It was wild weather in Anthony Pine's native village. Four men were sitting in the parlour of the inn. The winter's afternoon was darkening, but candles were not yet lighted, so that there was dusk behind the men and black shadows massed themselves in the corners of the room. Before them a glowing hollow of wood ash in the deep recess of the chimney-base shone redly through the swirls of tobacco smoke.

Outside the wind was rising and the spatter of rain squalls struck the unshuttered windows. The windows were small and deep sunk in the thick wall. Their many little twisted panes caught the red firelight in odd streaks and blotches so that in their distorted reflections on the smooth fat sides of pewter tankards they shone like braziers. The glow lit up the four there assembled so that each man saw his neighbour's warm-faced with all the lines and hollows deepened and eyes glinting redly. Thus illumined, all four showed strong and kindly, though in the flat light of day they bore but the faces of ordinary men, much weather-beaten, and revealing more of weakness than of strength, as indeed do the faces of ordinary men.

One face the firelight did little to strengthen, but added an honest kindliness that had else been wanting—an avid face, the features bold and well proportioned, the lips red above a smooth black beard, the eyes dark and large without softness. Richard Coppel was now a big-boned, hard-bodied man of middle age, still a daring seaman and a reckless liver, rather admired than loved in these parts to which he had come a stranger from the sea some twenty years before. He had but two observed passions: his boat and his skill to handle her in all weathers. On other subjects he was com-

placent. Suffering and joy drew from him the same unsympathetic tolerance, but the merits of a craft and the skill of him that handled her would always draw him into vehement discussion.

Talk straggled listlessly over local matters, but there was little interest in it, and one reproached another that he was not good company—" Art ever afraid to speak when Mr. Coppel be nigh? Seems the sight of un do freeze ee up like."

And another joined in remonstrating ponderously with the silent ones. " Be it an old grudge between ye two, or be it but natural unlikeliness? Whatever it be, one or t'other, let us have the hearing of it. These things be often cured by telling out."

Coppel was looking steadily at the fourth man, a passionless staring look. " There be one tale a daresent tell out," said he, " and it do be always on tip of un's tongue tickling for to be said. Hast never told it yet, Tony, man? "

His speech held a taunt and the quiet man said angrily, " The likes of thee, Richard Coppel, should be the last to tease speech out of them that would be silent. And for why shouldn't I tell if I be minded to? "

" You be afraid as I'll cut your fat little throat under the waggly beard of you," hazarded Coppel softly, and the other two men stared comprehendingly at one another and were silent.

Glasses were replenished, but speech did not revive with the steaming liquor wherein the firelight found an amber flame to kindle.

" Time was, this twenty and odd year ago, when 'twas held you'd be a merry talker and better'n old David Travis as used to be a master tale-teller in those old days, but you'm grown up so mum as an old tombstone and one might as well

expect cheerful speech from such. 'Twas an ill day for good company when you went wandering from this same spot in your hot youth, seemingly." The speaker looked round the group and addressing them generally, went on, his glass rising and falling slightly to emphasise the slow rhythm of his speech: "Time was, neighbours, in this very room, when four mortal men had not sat mumchance with their silent drinks throughout a winter's night. Many's the tale that's been told in this ancient place and though some of them were wild and bloody, and some not fitted by rights for pious ears, 'twas better harking to 'em than letting two folk's hatred spoil good company. No there bain't none hereabouts can tell a proper tale since old Travis died. Anthony here be a good-meaning man, but I say he've failed in his duty to his upbringing. Such an eddication as a must have had along of old Travis!"

Anthony Pine was now no more than middle-aged, but his hair was grey and a thin grey-streaked beard brushed his chest. The talk seemed to have roused excitement in him and he shifted uneasily in his seat. Suddenly he began to speak rapidly and easily in a smoothly modulated voice. "'Tis true," he said, "as I lived and learned along with David Travis, masters, and belike could tell a better tale than he were I ever now in the mood for tale-telling. But there be tales that make not good telling till folks be dead that stirred them. And there do be tales that strive for ever in a man's mind for to be told forth like the unborn babe stirring in the womb, they mun go their appointed time. Would you believe it, masters, for twenty years there has been one tale in my mind striving to be told forth—and never told? Aye, 'tis fresh as ever, Coppel, and it's not thy threatings have kept it secret." He leant towards his antagonist and lowered his voice menacingly: "I tell ee, what the dead remembers

they will not endure to be forgotten by the living."

He ceased. Coppel, too, was leaning forward staring as if to force the truth from those soft evasive eyes. "So she comes to you, too?" he asked slowly, never shifting his steady gaze from the smaller man's face.

"Aye, and why not to me who was wedded to her, as you never were, Dick Coppel, let me put you to mind? And it's her will masters, and her will alone that have locked my lips on the tale of this man's wickedness. Often I've prayed of her to let me speak out and always she've said with her little clucking maid's laugh, 'Bide till Dicky bids ee. Bide now, till un asks ee for it, for I fear 'twill be the death o' Dicky Coppel, the telling of it.'" The speaker said these last words in a sharp feminine treble, finishing with a high girlish chuckle, the work of an accomplished mimic. So spoken they sounded like a ghastly jest and his hearers blenched.

Not so the staring Coppel. He was ablaze with excitement, the glass shook in his fierce grip as he rose stretching it before him. He looked wildly at the company: "'Tis just how she spoke, masters," said he. "So that be what she tells ee, be it, Tony Pine? And to think I've threated ee to silence all this time. 'Tis past twenty years, masters, and I, too, have seen her times and times, not that she've ever spoke nor laughed at me. The nights I've seen her pale body float past under the curl of a big wave! First time I sprang to grapple her to bring her back to land for prayer and burial, for she was but seven days dead. I'd luffed up first, mark ee, and flung an arm out to grasp her, but the wave that swept by me was empty and she lay there under the curl of the next bearing down on me. Then I leapt, for I'd a been glad to drown, right into the green belly of the wave. But in the cold water there was nothing, and the sea daresen't drown the likes of me. So I was washed up, breathing in

Lydstone Bay, and the boat to Moresby Head next morning."

" 'Tis true. I mind the night you was pulled out of the bay limp and cold, but a breathing man, and the boat next morning, as told of, not so harmed as a coat of tar wouldn't mend her."

Coppel rose and turned crouching towards the others, his hand still stretching out with the glass before him so that it seemed to draw their eyes as if they had been appraising a great amber gem. " Times and times I've seen her beautiful body lay cold on the turn of a wave, and times I've luffed and grasped the naked water where she lay. Did ever man of this place sail wilder nights than me? And always for the sight of her, cold and still and sorrowful, and, my God! for the memory it brought me."

It was Anthony Pine that watched steadily now and the firelight failed to soften the hate in his face. " Bide till Dicky bids ee. Bide till un asks ee for it, for I fear 'twill be the death o' Dicky Coppel, the telling of it," he chanted, ending again with his girlish chuckle.

Coppel squared himself against the glow of the fire once more a strong hard figure of a man. Then he seated himself very composedly and, speaking in his normal voice: " Tell thy tale, Tony man," he said. " There are those as well as me as fain to hear as thou to tell it. A moment first. The glasses are low. Forward there," he shouted at the door. " Rum and hot water for the company, mistress! "

Drinks were brought and mixed, and candles set on the narrow shelf above the chimney breast. The great hollow of the fireplace sizzled and crackled with new sappy logs so that the drinks no longer glowed, and the uneasy atmosphere vanished as the room took on the ordinary aspect of winter evenings. One or two men made their way in from different parts of the house and Coppel insisted on their glasses being

filled at his charge. But even the newcomers felt that something strange was afoot and copied the strained silence of the original group. Coppel alone seemed at ease. He addressed a few remarks to each of them in an easier, kindlier manner than was his wont, and, indeed, that caused more surprise than good humour. He held his glass to the light, and then raised it to his lips lovingly. "Tony Pine, here, be going to tell us a tale, masters. Come, Tony man, tell it out," he pleaded. "There be others would hear it. Tut! take thy glass, man. It won't poison ee!"

"Nay," said Anthony Pine slowly as he fingered the glass, "Good liquor be good liquor, after all . . . and black hearts be black hearts, masters! Bear me out, all of ye," he cried suddenly, "he teased me for to speak."

Then settling himself, half face to the fire, half to the company, he began his story. He was a capable narrator, one of a tradition long since dead. He began in an easy fluent manner, for the tale had been conned over in his restless brain for more than twenty years. His hearers puffed at their pipes and sipped their liquor. At first, merely approving the diversion, their interest steadily grew until they were constrained to drag their seats in nearer so that a series of hard groans from wooden feet on a stone floor emphasised the pauses of the narrative. At length they all bent round the story-teller, leaning forward, pipes and glasses in hand, spellbound—none more so than Richard Coppel who, however, sat upright in a corner of the settle bench, and eyed his enemy coldly. At times he would smile very sweetly over his smooth brown beard, and at times he would nod calm acquiescence. As the night wore on, glasses would be silently replenished and late-comers join the group, but the interest never wavered.

At length when the narrator had spun the last thread

linking these bygone events with that present, he paused. Long sighs broke from his audience, but Coppel's face was still set firm. He still looked coldly and curiously at his enemy.

" She was no wanton, mark ye, masters," Pine resumed bitterly, " and God has revenged her in strange ways." He recounted how many of those prominent in the affair had perished at sea, giving names and recalling familiar tragedies of the coast in most of which he would be borne out by one or more of the company. " So they be all drowned that raised hand against her, save for this one man that did accuse her, and 'fore God, he sits here for the last time to-night. For many, aye many's the night she has come to me since, and, laughing as at a piece of maiden's folly : " You munna tell of Dicky," she'd say, " bide now till un asks 'ee for it, for 'twill be the death o' Dicky Coppel the telling of it." Again he ended with the blackbird's laugh, imitated so truly that it seemed to the hearers as if the dead were laughing, and they shuddered.

Coppel rose deliberately and faced the company. Behind him the great fire glowed in a red hollow again. He seemed to them then a menacing figure, his height being prolonged by his shadow looming over them from the ceiling.

" Masters, 'tis a true story save that no man may ever do justice to the mind and thoughts of another. But I have no quarrel with thee, Tony man, on that score. 'Twas passing well narrated. It lies not with me to speak her further ill, though to tell truth, that same virginity has never seemed to me to be a matter of much account, but if she were ordinary woman-flesh, how be it that her body be at sea to this day ? Many's the time, I tell 'ee, I have seen it sweep past in the curl of a wave, and many times have I luffed to grasp her, handling nought but the naked water. But to-

night I'll take her in my arms. Only Dicky Coppel would think of putting out a night like this, say ye? Y'are fools! 'Tis a wondrous fine night for a man to die! You, Tony Pine, wouldst not change with me? Y'ave had revenge these twenty years and once again I'm going to take her from you. Hast over-reached yourself, my man. Never again shall she tell you with her maid's laughter how to keep an unwilling man alive. And nights like these, my masters, take heed ye do not meet her spirit and mine abroad, for when poor souls fighting for harbour shall see us joying on the crests of the great waves there'll be wailing by the waterside.

He pushed his way through the throng sitting there drugged by the vision, cowed by the vehemence of his speech. The furious rush of the wind through the stone passages of the house as the great door slammed behind him brought them to their feet. They straggled out unwillingly and then, spurred by the nip of the gale, ran furiously to the quay. They were too late to stop the madman. As the moon showed momentarily through the rent clouds they sighted him passing steadily along the lee of the jetty in his boat, and they noticed she was close reefed as if he had known he must sail that night. At the far end the waves were breaking over the slippery stonework. In a few seconds his tiny sail had caught the wind and at once he shot forward against a whelm of water. They glimpsed the little craft ride up its smooth face like a gull ere the face of the moon was covered.

JULES ROMAINS

Quinette's crime[1]

[*Continued from our February Issue*]
For a synopsis of the previous instalments see page 413

His courage nearly failed the bookbinder when he reached the rue Vandamme. Abruptly he envisaged the sequence of his actions as a kind of slide which, by skilfully devised turns, led to a precipice. He was doubtful, not about his own power of reasoning in particular, but about reasoning in general.

"Everything that I am doing is perfectly reasonable. Let anybody show me where I have made a single mistake, a real mistake. At least since this morning."

There was, indeed, that visit of his to the "scene of the crime," which might be a moot point. Quinette would not like to swear that he had not obeyed some impulse as blind as that which leads criminals into a police trap.

"Twenty-one, twenty-three. It's a few houses further on. Now I can see the shop."

He slowed down. But when he came abreast of 31, he had still not made up his mind to go in. He wanted more time to think and also to get used to the locality of a fresh step. He went on as far as 37.

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[1] From *Men of Good Will* by Jules Romains. Translated from the French by Warre B. Wells. (Lovat Dickson, *Large Crown* 8*vo*. 8*s*. 6*d*. net.)

He had glanced at the shop as he went past. A frontage about three yards wide. The door was not in the middle. The biggest of the two windows, to the right, contained illustrated papers, a few specimens of writing-materials and haberdashery; and also some advertisements, hand-written on small pieces of cardboard, at the foot of the window. The other window, much smaller, contained a few toys of the simplest kind and jars of sweets. A screen of illustrated cheap editions, stuck on the inside in two rows by wooden clips, masked the door.

He went back on his tracks.

"I must reconnoitre first—see what kind of woman she is. I needn't say anything."

He pushed open the door. The action set the papers and clips making a noise of clapping and clicking which went on like a chime.

A plump little woman of about thirty, with round cheeks, smiling lips, a rather snub nose, unaffected eyes, auburn hair, not bad-looking on the whole, was sitting behind the counter in an attitude which suggested that she felt cold, with a black knitted scarf over her shoulders.

Quinette lost any sense of fear. He bowed in his most courtly manner.

"I have the honour of addressing Madame Sophie Parent?"

"Yes, monsieur."

He stroked his business-man's beard sedately and glanced around at the four corners of the shop. Then he spoke in the confidential voice of a lawyer.

"I should like to have a talk with you, madame—on a matter of some importance. Can we talk here without being overheard?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur, I'm sure we can."

Sophie Parent's face was suddenly convulsed with anxiety.

He pulled a cane-seated chair forward, removed a little cardboard horse which was standing on it, and sat down, with his elbow on the counter.

"Well, what I'm interested in is Augustin Leheudry."

"Oh, my goodness! . . . Yes . . . I knew that was what you had come about. . . . Oh dear, oh dear! . . ."

"Don't be alarmed, madame. I am a friend of Leheudry's: in fact, his best friend; and, more than that, his lawyer. If I have come to see you, it is because I know all about his affairs; and also because he can't come himself. . . . You know why, don't you?"

"No."

"Really?"

"No. . . . He certainly seemed rather funny, the last time, but——"

"He didn't say anything to you?"

"No."

Out of his deep-set eyes, the bookbinder scrutinised Sophie Parent. She did not look as though she were lying.

"Didn't you say anything to him when you found him looking rather funny, as you say?"

"I thought he was more worried than usual about those family troubles of his. I didn't want to add to them. Besides, we hadn't very much time together."

"Was that the time when he gave you—you know?"

She flushed, blinked her eyes several times, and tried to reply in a natural tone of voice.

"No. . . . What? . . ."

"Documents, and other things. . . . I repeat that I know all about everything, down to the smallest detail. You may imagine that I should not have taken charge of Leheudry's interests if I were going to let him hide things from me."

He lowered his voice; then he asked:

"Have you read the letters?"

"The letters? No. . . ."

She added, defensively:

"I don't know what there is in the parcel. He made me promise not to open it. I wasn't going to open it, naturally."

"That's all right. I mentioned these letters to you because their contents would have helped you to understand how important they are to us. . . . Yes, that's just what I came to talk to you about. The parcel cannot remain in your hands."

"But what's to be done, then? Tell me, monsieur."

"What's to be done? Go and get the parcel, without any delay, and hand it over to me."

She looked at Quinette askance and hesitated.

"I would rather give it to him in person."

"Impossible."

"Why?"

"He can't go out. He's in hiding."

Quinette turned towards the back shop, as though he were scenting invisible pursuers there.

"In hiding? Has he done something wrong?"

"He got hold of the papers—and the other things—in a way that was—let's say a little cavalier. Against my advice. His enemies are taking proceedings. That will blow over. The essential thing is that he should not fall into the trap, and that the papers should be in a safe place. If you will trust me, we shall be able to settle the whole business at once."

He stood up. His authority radiated over this woman who looked at him so open-eyed. She stood up, too.

"I shall have to shut up the shop."

"Just lock the door. There's no need to put up the

shutters. We'll take a taxi. You will be back inside half an hour."

As the taxi was crossing the Seine, she made a great effort and said :

" Listen, monsieur. You don't know how unhappy I feel. I swore to Augustin that nobody should touch his parcel, that I would keep it for him in my safe until the time came when he wanted it. It's all very well for me to say to myself that you are acting on his behalf ; but put yourself in my place."

Quinette answered her very gently :

" But that's very nice of you, madame—very nice of you. Of course, I quite understand. After all, you don't know me. . . . What are we to do ? "

" If you could come back another day, with him . . ."

" To begin with, we haven't got time. And, besides, they are on the watch for him. We should all be pinched. They would seize the papers, and our cause would be definitely lost. Not to speak of all the trouble it would bring on you. Examinations . . . subpœnas. . . ."

" What am I to do ? Oh dear, what am I to do ? We shall be there in a minute."

" We may be able to come to some arrangement. What is worrying you is that I should take away this parcel, which you regard, and rightly regard, as a sacred trust ? "

" Yes, monsieur."

She choked back her tears.

" What is worrying me is the risk he is running of being caught through some slip, through some unlucky chance. . . . In this safe of yours is there anything that belongs to you ? "

" Yes, my savings-bank pass-book and some bonds."

"How is it locked, this safe of yours? With a key, I suppose, and a combination?"

"Yes, a combination of three numbers."

"I know what we can do."

"What?"

"You take out everything that belongs to you. Keep it at home until to-morrow. You are not likely to have your house robbed between to-day and to-morrow. To-morrow go and rent a safe-deposit in a bank; and, as I am putting you to this unexpected expense, you will allow me to defray the cost. I believe that there are safes from twenty francs up in branch banks. To get your husband to sign a new authorisation, tell him anything you like . . . for example, that you have heard that there have been robberies at the Savings Bank, or that you would rather have a bank in your own neighbourhood. As for the safe you have now, in which you will leave nothing but Leheudry's parcel, you will give me the key of it."

"But that comes to the same thing as giving you the parcel!"

"Not at all. You know very well that, before you can go down to the vaults, you have to be identified and sign a slip. Can you see me presenting myself as Madame Sophie Parent? Besides, I'm not asking you for your three-figure combination. I don't want to know it. So, even if I could succeed in getting as far as the safe, the key would be no good to me."

"Then what do you want it for?"

"To be sure that nobody except myself can open the safe. Of course, you could make a declaration that you had lost and key and demand that it should be broken open. But why should you do that? To begin with, there would be an inquiry, delays, enormous expenses. Your husband

might get annoyed and say that henceforth he would take charge of this safe himself. He might begin by taking an inventory of its contents. Don't forget, either, that proceedings have been started about this parcel. I should not be at all surprised, in case the key were lost, if a representative of the police were present at the opening. Well, can't you imagine the sequel, for Leheudry and yourself?"

"It's all very upsetting . . . very dangerous. . . ."

"No, it isn't—not if you keep quiet. . . . Your husband will think that you have given the key back to the bank. It will be exactly the same thing as if the safe did not belong to you any more."

"I might even arrange, mightn't I, to go and pay the rent at the bank a little before it falls due, so that they shouldn't send their letter of reminder to me at home?"

"The very thing! Besides, between now and then I shall have brought Leheudry to you, so that he can tell you himself to hand over the parcel to me. Or I'll get him to give me a note in his own handwriting."

"A note! . . . That's true! Why didn't you bring a note from him?"

"Because I was in a position to give you much better proofs. . . . I needn't tell you that I still have any number of other details about him, about you, about how you met each other. . . . If you want me to quote them to you—— You won't have any more doubts about me."

"No, monsieur, I believe you."

"That strikes me as much more conclusive than three lines of writing and a signature, which it is easy to imitate. Besides, in confidential affairs, I don't like too many documents. You never know what happens to them. I may add that a lawyer, when he undertakes a commission, is usually taken at his word."

"Oh, forgive me, monsieur! I only said that because of the principle of the thing."

* * *

They went into the safe-deposit department.

"Do you want to come down with me?" she asked.

"Of course I do."

"Do you think it's allowed?"

"I'm sure it is. As the renter of a safe, you have a right to bring anybody you like with you—provided that you are present yourself. . . ."

In the basement, women by themselves, wearing wedding-rings, and couples of small investors or retired people, sitting at narrow tables, were tearing off dividend coupons. Sophie Parent felt herself seized by a frightful sense of self-pity that clutched at her heart. Why wasn't she one of these women? How nice it would be to come down to this warm basement and look over the household savings, put them in order, and take care of them while your husband, who trusted you implicitly, was away at work! You would go away with a few coupons in your hand-bag. You would cash them at the nearest bank; and then you would go and buy something that you had wanted for a long time and put it on the dining-room table in the evening, as a surprise.

Instead of that, she was carrying out a clandestine operation, which nobody in the world knew anything about, except this mysterious person who accompanied her. His mere presence seemed to her to be enough to diffuse through this basement, intended for respectable people, the air of a den of thieves. It was as though deceit, adultery, illegal practices, theft perhaps, and Heaven only knew what worse constituted her escort, led by this so-called lawyer with the

black beard, who, out of all the gang, was the only one visible.

" How his eyes frighten me ! I don't dare look at him."

The eyes of the lawyer were nothing but two black signals at the entrance to a tunnel.

" I know very well that I shall never get out of it."

But where was she going to find enough power of resistance to save her from plunging into it ?

* * *

Quinette lit the little lamp which served him as a night-light.

He had gone to bed early, feeling extremely tired and counting upon the relaxation of sleep. But sleep would not come to him. By way of compensation, however, the medley of confused anxieties, which had weighed upon him more and more as the day went on, gave place little by little to a more orderly view of things, whose very clarity was in itself comparatively soothing.

He set himself to recapitulate his day, to pass judgment upon it piece by piece. Some pieces were good, others doubtful, others again to be condemned. He achieved a nice degree of discrimination.

This mental labour of his ended by driving sleep away altogether. As he found it more tiring to lie awake in the dark like this, he lit his lamp.

To the left of the bed, with its spotless sheets and blankets, lay the room, small, modestly furnished, but itself in perfect order too. His clothes were folded on a chair. His electric belt was laid on the night-table, beside his lamp and his watch.

" My visit to the concierge in the little passage ? Good in one sense ; bad in another. I am numbered now among

the people who may be mentioned to the police as having visited, or revisited, the scene of the crime. But I had to find out about things. I found out something worth knowing. She saw Leheudry. Just a few minutes before he burst in on me. Could she give a description of him? No. Could she recognise him if they brought him there? She might. That's bad. She says she hasn't mentioned it to anybody yet. But if she did say anything about it, however vague it was, it might become pretty serious. The looks of him. The time. The place. If anybody saw Leheudry coming into my shop after that . . ."

Little by little his reflections decanted themselves. Minor difficulties still floated on top, but less and less perceptible and partially dissolved. Weightier difficulties sank to the bottom and monopolised his attention.

He bit his moustache. He fixed his sharp eyes on a flower on the wallpaper. He picked out a hair of his beard, pinched it between thumb-nail and finger-nail, and tugged it out suddenly, at the price of a pain that freshened him up. He went on scratching at that part of his body where the electric belt had left an irritation, and proceeded to sniff, with purely automatic curiosity, at the smell of perspiration that clung to his fingers.

One idea kept on growing in his mind.

"Leheudry's coming into my place, on Tuesday, October 6th, a few minutes after he had been seen in the passage. Leheudry's staying in my place—Leheudry covered with blood."

In the course of the day this idea had floated around in his mind among other ideas. It was only one among all those other question-marks of anxiety which had flickered, more or less quickly, across the light of his inner consciousness. But for the last hour or so it had gradually become a kind of

knot which caught up all the other diffused dangers.

Quinette tried to treat it with contempt.

" Of course if Leheudry hadn't come to my place, or if he had gone somewhere else, these other things would not have happened—at least, they would not have happened to me. It's simply silly to concentrate on a thing like that ! "

But what obsessed him was not that all these other things had happened afterwards. It was the mere fact of Leheudry's presence in his, Quinette's, shop, on the morning of October 6th.

Why ? Because it was impossible to be sure that nobody had seen Leheudry going into Quinette's place. Or, to put it more broadly, because the presence of somebody at a certain spot, at a certain hour, is a fact accomplished once and for all, which may leave nobody knows what traces. There was nothing to prove beyond all question that these traces might not be picked up, that the fact might not be brought home. (Quinette's later meetings with Leheudry were also, no doubt, facts which had come to pass, facts accomplished once and for all. But there was infinitely less chance of their being discovered, or even suspected, so long as their first meeting was kept dark.)

Wipe out something that had happened. A fascinating thought ! To what abyss it might lead him Quinette as yet had no idea ; but around it his mind played excitedly. Wipe out an event ; wipe out a thing. Efface any trace of an " existence," in the widest sense of the word. Quinette was not thinking particularly of a personal, a living, existence. Nor did he feel any desire to destroy.

What tempted him in this direction rather resembled the intellectual attraction of solving a problem. He realised that he had some gift for researches of this kind. His bent of mind asked nothing better than to work in this direction.

Already the first thrill of inventiveness had seized upon him.

But he had no leisure to dream as he would have liked. His obsession led him back sternly to a definite case. Quinette imagined a policeman confronting him. After some purely formal remarks the man said to him suddenly :

" Excuse me, monsieur. There is a *fact* about which we would like to have your explanation. Last Tuesday, about nine o'clock in the morning, a man came into your shop, who seemed to be very much upset. Now, this same person had emerged, a few moments earlier, from the passage which leads to the scene of the crime."

" But, monsieur . . ."

" There can be no question about it. This twofold fact is attested by two witnesses : the concierge at No. 18, and a woman who was shaking a cloth—contrary to the police regulations, as a matter of fact—out of the window of a house opposite. This person stayed in your house for a good half-hour. What happened during that half-hour ? "

Quinette framed replies, progressive admissions :

" I don't remember exactly. You say this man came into my shop ? Possibly. I suppose he talked about nothing in particular."

That position was untenable.

" Oh yes, I remember now. He wanted me to buy some pictures. I refused. He kept on pressing them upon me."

But the policeman sneered.

Quinette fell back upon a version which he had sketched from the very first day :

" He told me that he was hurt—that he wanted to have a wash. It certainly struck me as rather suspicious, but . . ." and all the rest of it.

The policeman countered :

" It's unbelievable that you should not have reported the incident to us."

As late as yesterday a reply was still possible :

" If I had heard anything about a crime, no matter how trivial a crime, in the neighbourhood, but . . ."

Since this morning, his silence had ceased to be justifiable.

He turned the question over in his mind.

" Suppose this were the truth ; that, as a matter of fact, the ' stranger ' did come into my place for the purpose of washing up, but that he remained the ' stranger ' ; that he told me nothing, that I never saw him again. What should I have done, really ? Should I have said nothing about it ? Perhaps. But only until this morning. As soon as I read the paper this morning, I should have had a shock. I should have grabbed my hat ; and I should have hurried to the police superintendent."

He repeated over and over again :

" I should have hurried to the police superintendent."

A voice of logic, metallic in its resonance, echoed in his head :

" Then you must hurry to the police superintendent."

He shrugged his shoulders. He protested.

" Ridiculous. An idea born of delirium. A product of tiredness and overwrought nerves. I refuse to consider it."

But consider it he did. He even went so far as to play with it in detail. He could see himself to-morrow morning getting up early and making his toilet carefully ; then going out, making his way through the cool streets. He had himself announced by the policeman on duty. " To make an important statement." The superintendent received him and asked him to take a chair. He sought for words in which to begin.

At this moment he realised that his decision was already

taken; that to-morrow morning nothing could prevent him from getting up early, making his toilet carefully, and going to see the superintendent. But he wanted to make sure just why he had to go.

First of all, he made confused replies to his own question.

"Because I ought to make the first move. I have a feeling that if I don't go to see him, he will come to see me. Initiative. Offensive. Choice of battlefield. Carrying the war into the enemy's camp."

Then his arguments stood out more clearly.

"The investigation is only just beginning. They still have quite open minds. The first information they get may prove decisive. My quite spontaneous testimony, besides diverting suspicion from me, may succeed in confusing the scent for good and all. What weight are witnesses on the other side likely to carry? A neighbour, half-asleep, who heard a noise? Another who saw Leheudry leaving the hovel from her window, a long way off? It would be too far off for that to count.

"There's the old concierge. That's bad. But it's bad only if Leheudry is arrested. Besides, I defy her to give a description of him which will be of any use—certainly not one which can stand up against the exactness of my own. My personality is bound to make a great impression. My testimony, thought out quietly by the only man in the world, apart from Leheudry, who knows all about the business, can be pitched at whatever degree of clearness, coherence, and probability I think suits me best. Even testimony which may be forthcoming later on can be discredited in advance by my own."

He felt a great sense of relief. He felt quite at one with himself, almost delighted with himself. His bed no longer seemed hostile to him. His sleeplessness would persist, but

it would be a fruitful sleeplessness, which he would employ in making and perfecting his plans and in which time would not count.

He had, it was true, one disturbing thought.

" Other people before me have tried to lead justice astray by cleverly faked testimony. That did not prevent them from being found out, after a period of following false clues, and ending on the scaffold. . . . Particularly in family crimes. Indeed, it has often been their own testimony, once it was recognised to be false, that gave them away.

" But in the first place, so far as I am concerned, whatever happens, there can't be any question of the scaffold. Don't let me think about the scaffold ! Besides, in family crimes, for example, that famous adage whose meaning I verified in Larousse the day before yesterday nearly always applies : *Fecit cui prodest.* A valuable rule, even for cases of being an accessory. When the son-in-law kills the father-in-law, after disputes between them that everybody knows about, and the servant, who is the son-in-law's mistress, lends a hand, the mind of the examining magistrate is made up from the very beginning. The investigation serves only to assemble the proofs, and its apparent hesitations only to amuse the audience. The poor fellow's testimony is received with smiles. Apart from that, as a rule it is very badly put together.

" One strong point in my own position is that my participation in the business is in itself utterly unlikely. Even Leheudry, who reaps the benefit of it, cannot make head or tail of it. Another strong point is that I am cleverer than most people. Why should I not recognise that I am ? The fact that I have not been successful in my career doesn't mean anything. Besides, you may be quite clever, and still lose your head in certain circumstances. I don't lose my

head. Since last Tuesday, of course, I have discovered that I do not possess absolutely complete presence of mind. But I'm not very far from it.

" At this moment, for example, my brain is working with as much clear-sightedness as though I were sitting in front of the plans of my single-rail railway. And if I spend to-night in drafting the terms of my deposition as carefully as possible, taking everything into account, even the danger that there might be in being too definite, and also the very slight air of there being something odd, something inexplicable, about it that one must leave around the incident, like a dash of garlic, so that it conveys the impression of really having happened—well, all I want is a cup of black coffee stronger than usual and I guarantee to be a match for all the police superintendents and examining magistrates in the world ! "

This extreme clear-sightedness which the bookbinder felt—he imagined he could follow its radiation to the very limits of his consciousness. Nevertheless, it left perhaps the most decisive origins of what he proposed to do to-morrow in the dark. Of course, he did not ignore them entirely ; but he saw no reason why he should recognise them. He respected in them what a man always cherishes and protects above everything else : the mainspring of his innermost formulas of conduct, the trade secrets of his actions, which are really personal to himself.

In this connection Quinette had some weaknesses which he avoided confessing to himself ; for example, a kind of fear, belonging to the same family as vertigo, which led him, in the presence of the most threatening danger, to advance straight at it, less for the purpose of challenging it or estimating it than for the purpose of touching it, as other people touch iron or wood. So much so that his fondness for

" preventive action," which had already taken him to the hovel in the rue Dailloud and to the rue Vandamme, was perhaps not so much like a self-defensive reaction as a superstitious rite.

He had also an almost irresistible desire to live through those dramatic scenes which imagination suddenly presents to you and which you can make real almost by raising your hand. Quinette might have given this desire a flattering name by calling it a taste for taking risks. Better still, he might have associated it with that itch to be up and doing which had taken possession of him that very morning after Juliette's visit.

But to-night, in the solitude of that rather chilly room, in those sheets not all of whose folds were warmed by his body, Quinette, tired after a long, exhausting day, distrusted any flights of imagination. He made up his mind that he would take no decision which was not fully justified by the light of reason. He tried to give himself the impression that he was acting without any enthusiasm, in obedience only to cold-blooded calculation.

So he had little chance of realising that perhaps his strongest motive was desire to come into contact with the police as soon as possible. Deep down in him, for the last six days, this desire had been growing all the time. Now Quinette was impatiently awaiting the moment when, in a small office, he would be sitting down face to face with a man who meant the police, who was a member of the police, a tentacle of the police, one of their innumerable pairs of eyes at the end of tentacles.

During these past six days, without his making any special call upon his imagination, the role of the police had been growing upon him as something more and more real, more and more haunting. He could sense them gliding along the

streets, feeling their way along walls, fumbling about. They were clumsy, purblind gestures. But they went on and on, persistently. They were slimy gropings; but, side by side with all this, there was the instantaneous circulation of ideas, of information, of orders from one end of this great organism to the other.

This vast, creeping quest does not interest everybody. Quinette had just made the discovery that some men are responsive to the police, that there is a kind of reciprocal sensitiveness between them. Such men feel the police spreading their tentacles and approaching. The police feel such men recoiling and fleeing. Until the morning of October 6th, Quinette was not responsible to the police. He had become so.

In him this sensitiveness, so far, implied not so much terrified apprehension as curiosity, sympathy, an attraction akin to pity. It demanded that, instead of shunning the police, he should go to meet them, go and "throw himself at their heads." Perhaps in order to rid himself of any fear of them. Perhaps to try a very daring experiment; and because instinct counselled him to get used to the police, to learn, without loss of time, how to meet their proceedings, their threats, their attacks. (Something told him that his relations with them would never come to an end now.) But, above all, because he expected that this interview would give him a keen sense of pleasure.

"I might have been one of them," he reflected. "I told Leheudry so without making any effort at all. I can see myself as one of them very easily. All the qualifications for it."

His step the next morning might well be the manœuvre of an adversary; but it would also be the visit of a lover.

"I must apologise for disturbing you at such an early hour, Superintendent, and also for having more or less forced my way in to you. But you will soon see why. I think I have some interesting testimony to give you about this business that the whole neighbourhood is talking about. I refer to the crime in the rue Dailloud."

The superintendent, who was expecting to hear some commonplace complaint and preparing to listen to it without much interest, raised his head. He had before him, unquestionably, one of the most respectable citizens of the fifteenth district.

"I may tell you, Superintendent, that this has kept me awake all night. I nearly came to see you yesterday evening; but I hesitated about it. When you have always led a quiet life, as I have, you don't like thrusting yourself forward. To find yourself mixed up in an affair like this, however indirectly, is extremely unpleasant.

"Here are the facts. I am an art bookbinder. My workshop, and my house, happen to be situated in the rue Dailloud. I have a small but select clientele. Not much coming and going. Not many new faces. My shop is a little sanctuary of work, and it would give me great pleasure, Superintendent, at some suitable time, to show you some specimens of an art which still preserves worthy traditions."

"Yes, I think I know your shop. It is on the right-hand side, coming from the boulevard, isn't it?"

"Exactly, Superintendent. I am sure you are a book-lover. You must have noticed some fine volumes that I have on display. Next time, please be so good as to come in. We must have a chat. I should like to show you, in particular, one or two illustrated editions of the eighteenth century, rather indecorous, but very beautifully done.

"Well, last Tuesday, at least I think it was last Tuesday—

that would make it just a week ago—I was engaged in doing a delicate bit of adjustment in my workshop when I heard the street door of my shop thrown open violently. I hurried out. I saw a man, who seemed respectable enough, but whose clothes were dirty in one or two places, and whose hands were cut, or at least grazed. He was very much upset. He said to me : ' I have just been knocked down by a vehicle. Would you let me have a wash ? '

" I confess, Superintendent, that at the moment it did not occur to me to verify what the man said. I just glanced into the street, but I didn't see anything. Then I led the stranger to the tap in my kitchen. While he was washing himself, I questioned him tactfully. It seemed to me quite natural that he should be upset.

" ' What kind of vehicle was it ? '

" ' A motor-car,' he told me.

" ' Where did it happen ? '

" ' Almost outside your door.'

" ' But didn't the car stop ? Didn't they offer to help you ? '

" ' No. Besides, it was my own fault. I don't even know whether the driver noticed the accident.'

" Well, Superintendent, it all sounded likely enough. Even his coming to my place. There isn't a chemist in the whole street. Besides, I'm not suspicious by nature. There was one thing that did surprise me : a handkerchief covered with blood that the stranger took out of his pocket for a moment. But, as a matter of fact, that could be accounted for, too. I simply said to him : ' You've bled a lot.' He replied with something like : ' It's better if you do,' or ' It isn't anything serious.' He went off again in about twenty minutes, perhaps, after thanking me. I thought no more about him. I was not even surprised that I didn't hear

anything about a street accident. For one thing, I keep very much to myself. For another, these motor-cars have made us so indifferent, so used to being constantly in danger. . . . But you can imagine now, Superintendent, the association of ideas that came into my mind yesterday morning, when I read the paper."

The Superintendent hesitated a moment. Then he smiled and asked:

"You think——"

"Oh, I don't say for a moment that there is necessarily any connection. There is so little, indeed, that when I read the news of the crime for the first time yesterday morning, or, to be more exact, yesterday at noon, I thought about all sorts of things, in particular the lack of security in a neighbourhood which seemed to me so quiet, and whether it would not be a wise precaution, for a man living by himself like me, to get a good watch-dog; but never for a moment about my visitor last Tuesday. It was only in the evening, when I took up the paper again, that the idea came into my head. I repeat that I very nearly came to see you at once. I thought better of it, partly out of distaste for doing such a thing, and partly, too, to give myself time to think about it. Well, it has been racking my brain all night; and I thought it better to come and tell you about it, even at the risk of wasting your time."

"Not at all. You are quite right. At first sight, I don't think there is any connection between the murder of that old witch and the visit of this man of yours. In the first place, the date does not seem to coincide. Nor the time either." ("Nor the time either," thought Quinette. "Good. The concierge hasn't said anything yet; or they didn't take any notice if she has.") "The crime is not likely to have been committed in broad daylight. But people who think they

have any clues, however doubtful, are quite right in such cases to communicate them to us. It is for us to follow them up. That reminds me, the inspector who is in charge of the preliminary investigations ought to be in the next room at this moment. We'll ask him for his opinion."

The inspector, who was a man of about thirty-five, fairly tall, full-cheeked, reasonably agreeable, and looking more like a commercial traveller than a policeman, listened to the superintendent's summary of the bookbinder's deposition.

" Obviously, there's not much chance that this is the man we're looking for. But, as we have no clue so far . . ." (Quinette thought again : " The old woman hasn't said anything.") " . . . it's not for us to raise difficulties. Was your man carrying anything ? "

" No . . . I really didn't notice. But I'm pretty sure he wasn't."

" Of course, he might have handed it over to an accomplice. That's assuming that he had an accomplice. What time was it ? "

" I had been at work for some time already. I didn't notice the exact time. About the middle of the morning."

" Ten o'clock ? "

" Nearer half-past nine."

The Superintendent intervened :

" That's just what I was saying to this gentleman. The times don't coincide."

" Only so far as our provisional theory goes. I recognise that it isn't easy to imagine the crime being committed in broad daylight. But the murderer may have taken his time about leaving the place, for some reason or other."

" The date doesn't fit either."

" I know the doctors talk about Sunday. But, if you ask me, you can't be sure within forty-eight hours. . . ."

Quinette interrupted gently.

" I thought you would have had some clue . . . or even some other testimony already. It's curious that the neighbours saw nothing, heard nothing . . . ."

The police officers did not reply. They seemed to be thinking.

" If the information I've brought you doesn't connect with anything, naturally it loses most of its interest."

" That's no reason for not following it up," the inspector went on. " Do you remember this man at all well ? Could you give us a description of him ? "

Quinette said to himself, in a flash :

" Here is the decisive moment. Everything may depend on this. Now is the time for all the thought, all the clever calculations, on which I spent the whole night."

A little before dawn he had written down, point by point, the imaginary description which he had decided to give. The piece of paper was folded up in his pocket. He could remember just how the lines ran. But he must avoid the tone of voice of a man who is reciting something learned by heart. Or, rather, while he was making one effort of memory, orderly and quick, he must pretend to be making another, much more groping.

" I think I can," he began, " though it's hardly in my line. More especially as he had a very striking face. His nose, above all—very hooked, it was ; and black eyes, under bushy brows. Thin, hollow cheeks. Rather a—how should I put it ?—Spanish air about him ; or even Oriental."

" A moustache ? "

" Yes. Black, bushy, rather long."

" Forehead high or low ? "

" Rather low."

" Thin in the face, eh ? "

"Yes."

"About what age?"

"In his forties."

"What height? What build?"

"I was just going to say tall, but I'm not sure whether his thinness didn't make him look taller than he was."

"Just a moment, while I make a note of all that. In short, a kind of darky?"

"Yes . . . but not conspicuously so."

"Had he a foreign accent?"

"No. A rather deep voice . . . nothing out of the way."

"His nose was hooked, you say. Not broken, was it? Or with the bone very prominent, just here?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Do you remember any definitely characteristic marks? Moles? Birth-mark? Pock-marks? Scars?"

"A few little holes in the skin, I think, which might have been pock-marks. But I don't remember now where they were."

"And his ears?"

"Big. Yes, I should say very big."

"Any particular shape? Pointed?"

"Rather . . . I think."

(Hereupon Quinette thought of his own ears.)

"With or without a fold at the top, did you notice?"

"No—I mean . . . ." And Quinette added, with a disarming air of confusion: "I imagined that I had his face photographed on my mind. As a matter of fact, I'm hesitating about a number of details, as you see."

"But it's very good as it is, I assure you. The descriptions that we generally get are much vaguer than that. How was he dressed?"

Quinette appeared to be thinking. During the night he

had carefully debated this point. He had come to the conclusion that the best thing was to be rather hazy about clothes. If anybody had happened to see Leheudry coming into his shop, from a neighbouring house, for example, that witness would have observed the colour and the look of his clothes better than anything else. Why should Quinette run the risk of putting himself in contradiction with him?

"There again I must confess that I'm embarrassed. The only thing to which I could swear is that he was wearing a bowler hat. . . ." (In mentioning the bowler hat the bookbinder was putting himself in agreement, without much danger, with the possible witness.) ". . . Apart from that, he seems to me to have had a cheap ready-made suit. . . . The colour escapes me entirely."

"Yes, probably some kind of grey. Any other point you recall?"

"Oh yes, he had a very prominent Adam's apple."

"If you saw him again, would you recognise him for certain?"

"I'm sure I should."

"Well, we'll see about all that."

Quinette stood up.

"I am at your disposal, gentlemen. Though, at the same time, I hope you won't want me."

The inspector accompanied him out into the corridor.

"That will depend on how the inquiry goes. If we obtain any results in quite a different direction, there is no reason why we should bother about your man. But if that is the only clue we have, we shall certainly have to lay our hands on him. And then we shall have to call upon you again. Many thanks, in any case."

(*To be continued*)

QUINETTE'S CRIME

Synopsis of previous instalments :

It is the 6th of October, 1908. Suburban Paris goes to work.

Juliette Ezzelin goes into the shop of Quinette, the bookbinder, and leaves a book with him. He makes an odd impression upon her. On her way back, she notices, in an alley, a man flattening himself curiously against the wall. This man, a few minutes later, bursts into Quinette's shop and asks if he may have a wash. His hands, his clothes, are stained with blood. Quinette prevails upon this man to meet him that evening, at ten minutes to six, in the rue Saint-Antoine.

He then takes a turn around the district where the man lives, to find out whether there is any talk about a crime committed in the neighbourhood. Shall he hand the man over to the police or not ?

A little later he goes to his rendezvous in the rue Saint-Antoine. He meets his man of the morning, who, by a complicated itinerary, takes him to the back room of a little wine-shop in the Jewish quarter. Quinette extracts a half-confession of his crime from him, obtains some details intermingled with evasions, and offers him his advice and assistance. The bookbinder follows the suspected murderer to the hiding-place which he has chosen, in the rue Taillepain. They talk. How is the other to side-track suspicion ? How is his trunk to be got out of the hotel where he left it ? Quinette discovers a way out. But an incident reveals the fundamental dishonesty of the stranger, whose name he finds is Leheudry.

A week later the newspapers announce that in a hovel in the Vaugirard district the body of an old woman, murdered about a week ago, has just been discovered. Juliette goes to fetch her book. The job is not finished. Quinette has other things on his mind. Since that morning, when he read the news and realised that the crime has been discovered, he has been thinking out a plan of action. He begins by making a careful inspection of Leheudry's trunk.

Quinette goes off to meet Leheudry, finds him in a bar, takes him inside Saint-Merri's Church, and questions him. The interrogation is continued in a café. The bookbinder learns that Leheudry has entrusted the " swag " to Sophie Parent, who keeps a stationery-shop in the rue Vandamme.

Quinette visits the scene of the crime. He learns that the concierge caught a glimpse of Leheudry. Early in the afternoon he goes to see Sophie Parent and persuades her to hand the key of the safe where she is keeping the swag, over to him.

Our Contributors

L. A. G. STRONG, three parts mixed Irish and one part West Country English, owes much to this mongrelism, which has not only mingled Celt and Saxon in his blood, but has made him free of two distinct backgrounds. He was educated at Brighton College, from where he went as a classical scholar to Wadham College, Oxford. Beginning to write verse, and later short stories, he waited till he was thirty-three before publishing his first novel. His short stories have appeared in a number of periodicals here and in America, and he has been five times represented in Edward J. O'Brien's "Best Short Stories of the Year" series. Three volumes of his short stories have been issued, and a fourth is likely to appear during the next twelve months.

H. E. BATES, who is the author of several novels and many short stories, worked at one time as a provincial newspaper reporter, and later as a warehouse clerk. He wrote his first novels and stories while working as a clerk, and though his first ambition was to be a playwright, and his first published work a play, he has since become best known as a writer of stories. A new volume of his stories, *The Woman Who Had Imagination*, has just appeared.

SAUL PADOVER was born in 1905 in the now Polish province of Galicia. His education in Vienna was only half completed on the outbreak of war. He made his way to America in 1920, and without knowing a word of English went to school again in Detroit, Michigan, taking his degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago, in 1932. He is now a lecturer in History at the University of California. Last year he published a largely autobiographical novel, *Let the Day Perish*. It describes the effects upon a Jewish family of a Pogrom in a Polish village; a bitter, passionate novel which has been much discussed both in America and in this country. Padover is now at work on a biography of Joseph II of Austria.

AIDAN REARDEN CONNER was born in Dublin in 1905. He was educated in Dublin and Cork, and on the streets of London. He began life with the intention of becoming a surgeon, but the Irish "trouble" upset his plans. He has been in turn a clerk, canvasser, London "down-and-out," navvy, salesman, furniture porter, and landscape-gardener. His interests besides writing are, he says, gardening and rockery construction.

MARIAN BOWER was never educated, she tells the Editor; not, that is, in the modern sense of the word. She learned the use of the globes and the art of deportment from the same governess who had introduced these branches of erudition to her mother.

Starting life with a predilection for variety in the matter of spelling, from that day to this she has been almost as impartial in the distribution of vowels or the doubling of consonants as were our Elizabethan ancestors. Arithmetic, it is true, was supposed to be inculcated by an individual who came once a week, and was spoken of as Herr Professor. But as Herr Professor had fought in the Franco-Prussian War, and the one certainty about her calculations was that, only by accident did two and two come out at four, the small girl found it not without advantage to turn Herr Professor's mind away from, say, fractions to his soldiering days. And, by the time he had charged once again at Gravelotte (he called it St. Privat), it was a matter of as much indifference to him as it was to her, whether it required one or more of those "damned dots" to solve the problem; or whether curious feats of multiplication, with little figures one above the other, with the line between them and crosses distributed here and there as if they were kisses sent from the scullery-maid to the garden boy, would better meet the case.

BORIS PILNIAK—his real name is Wogaü—was born in 1894. He made his *debut* in Russian literature very young, but it was not until 1922 that his novel, *The Naked Year*, made him world-famous. An indefatigable traveller, Pilniak returned to Moscow from America last year, and has since published a remarkable work, *O.K.*, which is rather propaganda than fiction. His story, *The Assassination*, published in English in this issue for the first time, got him into serious trouble. Its hero is obviously to be identified with Frounze, the famous Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army. Since its original publication, Pilniak, accused of *bourgeois* tendencies, has written very little, and prefers to deal with less dangerous subjects.

ANN NAPIER was born in Wales and lived in Monmouthshire until quite recently. She has travelled a great deal, particularly in Africa (where she has been big game hunting), and in both North and South America. She has done a certain amount of colour printing, and had an exhibition of etchings four years ago in London. She has also contributed to *Punch*.

ARTHUR GRANT MORRIS was born in London in 1899, and he is an equal mixture of English and American.

He was educated at Westminster School and, after a brief war career, at Trinity College, Cambridge, and Westcott House Theological College. In spite of musical activity on the violin he just managed to take a degree, and he was ordained in 1923. After working in Southwell Diocese and in London he is now a Somerset rector, near the Quantock Hills, with a wife and three sons.

EARDLEY BESWICK was born in Manchester, and reared in Devonshire. He lives in East Anglia. He attended private schools and public technical colleges, but claims to have received the only valuable part of his education in factories and on public works. Trained as an engineer he has earned a living as a factory manager, an architect, a contractor's agent, and a sales manager, among other things. From corset stiffeners to steam lorries he has made, or helped to make most things. He has been writing short stories since boyhood, and it was only after some twenty years of rejections that he succeeded in becoming a contributor to the *Manchester Guardian* back page, where some of his best work has appeared. Since then his stories have been published by many of the leading literary magazines, and last year his industrial novel, *Original Design*, scored for him a distinct success. He has a strong aversion to refined or gutless writing, and to short stories without a plot.

JULES ROMAINS first attracted the attention of discerning critics in this country with his book published in 1914 under the title *Death of a Nobody*. *Men of Goodwill* (of which the story of Quinette the Bookbinder forms only a small part) was published last autumn, and is steadily gaining him new admirers in this country. The stories of his numerous characters are carried on in a further volume, *Childhood's Loves*, which will be published in book form during March.